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SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

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rools

ULTIMATE GUIDE: BACK TO SKOOL

WE REVISIT MICROSPHERE'S CHARMING SPECTRUM SEQUEL

THE MAKING OF: HUNTER

HOW PAUL HOLMES CRAFTED HIS AMBITIOUS AMIGA HIT

SONIC™ ORIGINS

HOW SEGA AND SONIC FANS ARE CREATING THE ULTIMATE LOVE LETTER

THE EVOLUTION OF DRIVER

MARTIN EDMONDSON LOOKS BACK AT THE GRITTY OPEN-WORLD SERIES

THE MAKING OF GLOVER

HOW A GAME OF CRAZY GOLF INSPIRED THIS INVENTIVE PLATFORMER

PLUS

THE STORY OF E3

ADVANCE WARS: DARK CONFLICT

LAND OF ILLUSION STARRING MICKEY MOUSE

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NET FIGHTER

HOMEBREW

FUTURE
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prime video

THE BOYS

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SONIC MOMENT?

DARRAN JONES

Whenever I think of Sonic I think of the killer whale attack from *Sonic Adventure*. I'll often return to that first stage just to experience it.

Expertise: Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!

Currently playing: *Geometry Wars: Galaxies*

Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Figuring out that infamous barrel in *Sonic 3* by myself. But only after banging my head against a wall for a few days.

Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they leave the service

Currently playing: *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*

Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

I came close to losing my mind when Silver Sonic, from the Master System version of *Sonic 2*, made a return as part of the Metal Sonic boss in *Sonic Mania*. What a deep cut!

Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III

Currently playing: *Final Fantasy VII Remake*

Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

The build up to the release of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* was the first time I remember seeing any hype for a videogame, and from what I remember is wasn't as well-received as the original.

Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!

Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord*… Modded of course

Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War*

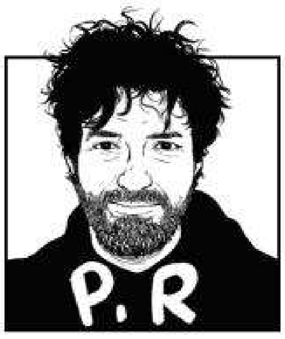
PAUL DRURY

Plugging *Sonic 3* into *Sonic & Knuckles* and feeling like my Mega Drive had been designed by Heath Robinson. Also, finally realising why Tails' real name was Miles Prower. I'm 52, you know.

Expertise: Smoking in the spray room

Currently playing: *Chernobylite*

Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*



PAUL ROSE

Sonic Spinball! Hugely underrated, and the most logical extension of any game franchise ever.

Expertise: Winging it

Currently playing: *Micro Machines 2*

Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

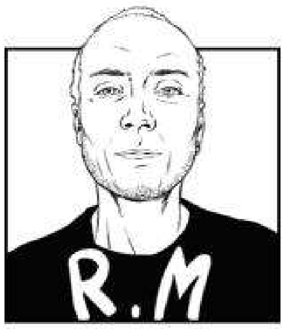
ANDREW FISHER

Playing the amazing C64 conversion by Mr SID released at the end of 2021 – a real technical marvel.

Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch

Currently playing: *Rival Gangs EXT*

Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*



RORY MILNE

The Sonic moment that always makes me smile is when you race to the top of a ramp in *Sonic R*'s Reactive Factory course, and momentarily launch yourself into the sun-soaked Sega-blue sky.

Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing: *Paradroid*

Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

LOADING...

Here's a frightening thought - I realised earlier that many of today's gamers won't associate Sonic with Sega consoles. It makes sense, as it's been over two decades since Sega's mascot appeared on a Sega system and it's even more sobering to realise that he only spent ten years of his life appearing on Sega formats.

But still, what a decade it was and for many Sonic fans it's those early outings that were both so formative for the growth of Sega's new mascot and also their love for the impossibly speedy hedgehog. Sega knows this all too well which is why its incoming release of *Sonic Origins* is exciting fans so much.

We've been lucky enough to speak to Simon 'Stealth' Thomley, a Sonic fan himself who has been behind Sega's new back-to-basics collection and he talks exclusively about what it's like to curate a series of games that mean so much to him. We've also put together a tremendous miniature magazine of Sonic moments which we're sure Sonic fans will love.

Looking beyond Sega's mascot, our new issue revisits the ambitious Amiga game *Hunter* and examines the evolution of Reflections' *Driver*. Graeme Mason goes *Back To Skool* and Paul Drury chats to Paul Niemeyer about his fascinating career as an arcade artist. We've also got a great subs offer on page 30, so do check it out.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

retro GAMER
SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION
SONIC ORIGINS

CONTENTS

>> Load 234 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

06 **Main News**
We pay tribute to David Ward, the cofounder of Ocean Software

08 **Iain Lee**
If you're a fan of Sega's Dreamcast, Iain will be a fan of you

10 **Mr Biffo**
Why doesn't gaming have more rock stars? Paul would like to know

12 **A Moment With**
Meet the YouTuber who loves turning old retro tech into exciting new products

14 **Back To The Noughties**
It's September 2005 and Nick reports on the launch of the PSP in Europe and much, much more

REVIVALS

16 **Pirate Ship Higemaru**
If Nick hadn't investigated Capcom's PSP compilation he'd have completely missed this arcade classic

54 **Sailor Moon S: Jōgai Rantō!? Shuyaku Sōdatsusen**
If you think this one-on-one fighter is aimed at girls, Nick suggests you should rethink your opinion

72 **F1 Racing Information**
Some games leave a real impression on you and this Saturn racer certainly excited young Nick

92 **Feeding Frenzy**
Darran explains how any game becomes better when you play it with your child

112 **Advance Wars: Dark Conflict**
Find out what happened when Intelligent Systems rethought its strategy series

FEATURED

46 **Hardware Heaven: Game Pocket Computer**
Nick is once again here to instruct you in an obscure system of yore

48 **Ultimate Guide: Typhoon**
Everything you need to know about Konami's inventive arcade shoot-'em-up

62 **Classic Moments: Land Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse**
If you're not a fan of snakes you may want to skip the following pages

74 **The Making Of: Net Fighter**
Find out what happened when SegaSoft attempted to make an online-only fighting game in the mid-Nineties

78 **The Making Of: Glover**
Discover how a game of crazy golf led to a fantastically inventive N64 platformer

84 **Peripheral Vision: Dreamcast Arcade Stick**
If you like playing the Dreamcast's many arcade conversions you'll find this joystick to be an essential purchase

86 **In The Chair: Paul Niemeyer**
We chat to the talented artist behind some of the most striking arcade side-art of the Eighties and Nineties

18 **The Story Of: Sonic Origins**
Sega's got a brand-new compilation of *Sonic* games on the way, so we chatted to Simon Thomley about its creation and included titles

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rools

32 **Ultimate Guide: Back To Skool**
We asked Graeme Mason to pen an essay on this Spectrum classic. You're welcome

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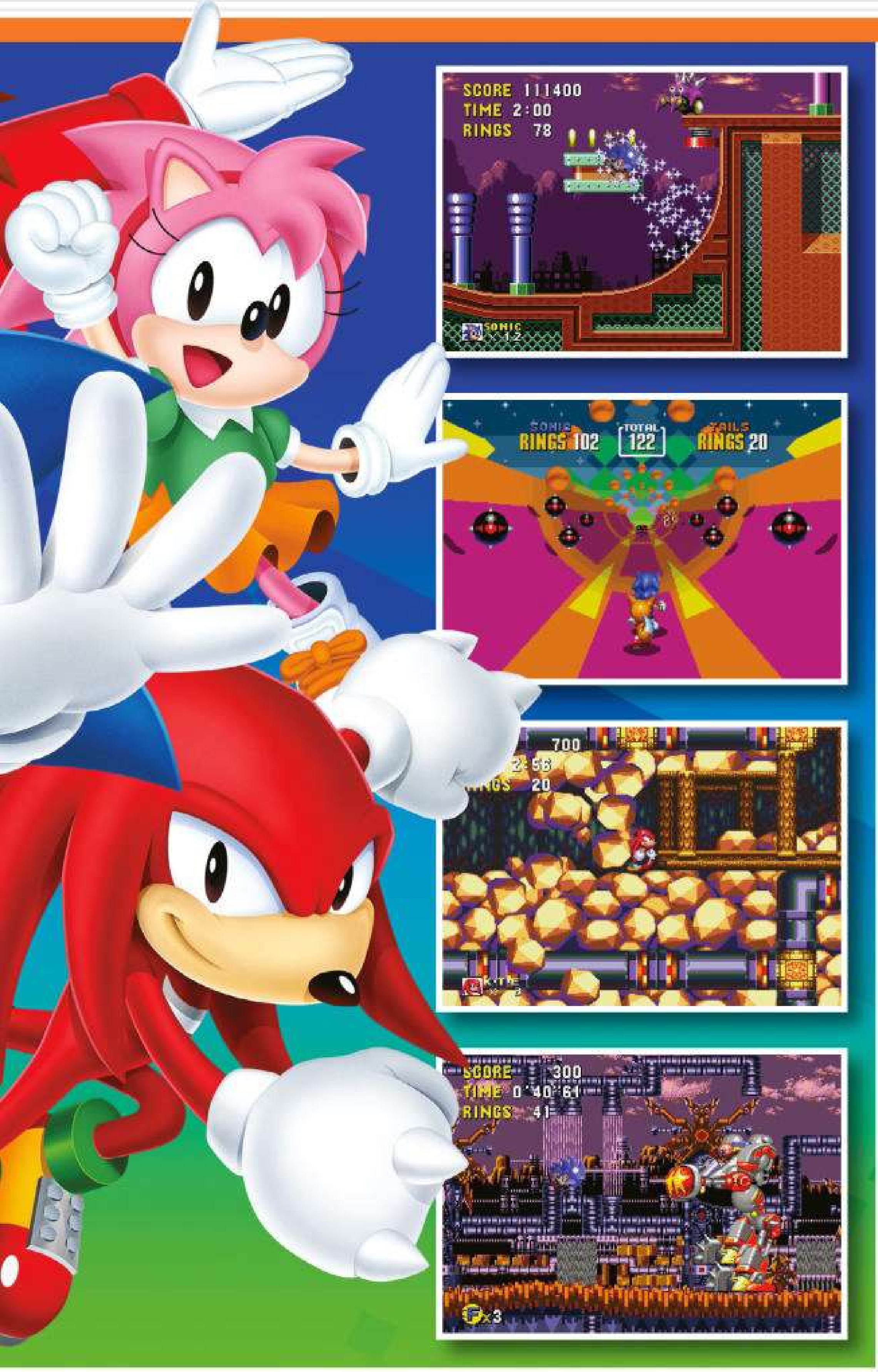
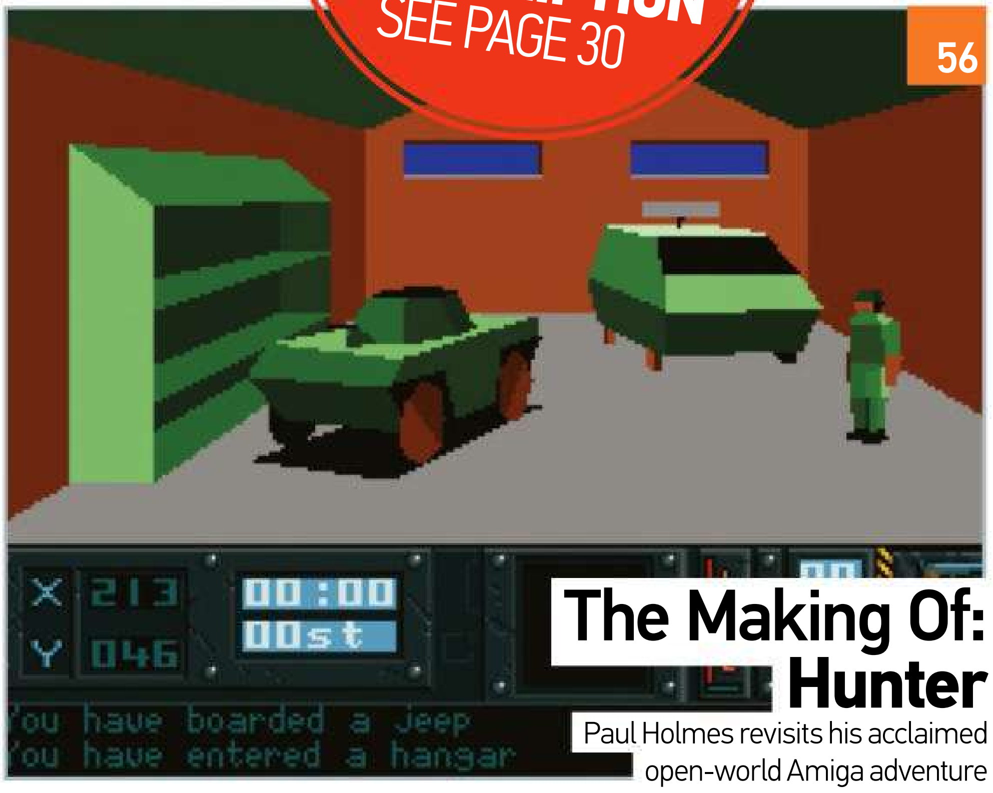


FREE GIFT SUBSCRIPTION SEE PAGE 30



You have boarded a Jeep
You have entered a hangar

56

The Making Of: Hunter

Paul Holmes revisits his acclaimed open-world Amiga adventure

40

The Story Of: E3

64

The Evolution Of: Driver

Martin Edmondson looks back at Reflection's popular open-world crime franchise

REVIEWS

94 **Rogue Legacy 2**

96 **Cotton Fantasy**

96 **Makai Kingdom: Reclaimed And Rebound**

96 **Taito Milestones**

96 **HunterX**

ESSENTIALS

30 **Subscriptions**
More exhilarating than clearing Sonic's first stage in under 31 seconds

98 **Homebrew**
Andrew Fisher is back with more homebrew love

102 **Hot Topic: Online antics**
Do the team play nicely when they play online? There's only one way to find out…

104 **Collector's Corner**
If you're a big fan of anything Commodore, you're going to love this month's collector

106 **My Retro Life**
Darran's recently been playing Wii games and realises that there are a few he shouldn't have sold

108 **Mailbag**
Lots of lovely letters this month. Please keep them coming, they do cheer us up

114 **Endgame**
Darran reaches the end of another classic game

SPEED
DISTANCE
96 2
HIGH
0 126 10
SC
TIME

» [Amiga] *Batman* was a monstrous hit for Ocean and sold bucket-loads of Amigas.

DAVID WARD PASSES

Ocean staff pay tribute to the company's cofounder

CONTENTS

6 DAVID WARD PASSES
We pay tribute to the cofounder of Ocean Software who recently passed away

8 IAIN LEE
Our resident columnist recalls the time he was able to blag Sega's Dreamcast for free

10 MR BIFFO
Paul wants to know why the games industry doesn't have its very own rock stars

12 A MOMENT WITH
Meet the YouTuber who turned an old Hot Wheels PC into a piece of cutting-edge tech

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick bravely crosses the time lines because Darran once again lost his own set of keys

On 9 May it was reported by Ben Ward that his father, David Ward, the cofounder of Ocean Software, had passed away. "Sad to report that my father David Ward has died," Ben tweeted. "Born in 1947, he was a computer games pioneer and father of six. We had a complicated relationship and we loved each other. Will miss you pop."

The news spread quickly across social media with many gaming veterans paying their respects. "He was one of the pioneers of the games industry," commented David Darling, cofounder of Codemasters. "A true entrepreneur, very talented and will be sorely missed." The sentiment was shared by Ian Stewart who founded the Sheffield-based Gremlin Graphics who referred to David as, "A true pioneer and entrepreneur. He will be remembered fondly by many. My condolences."

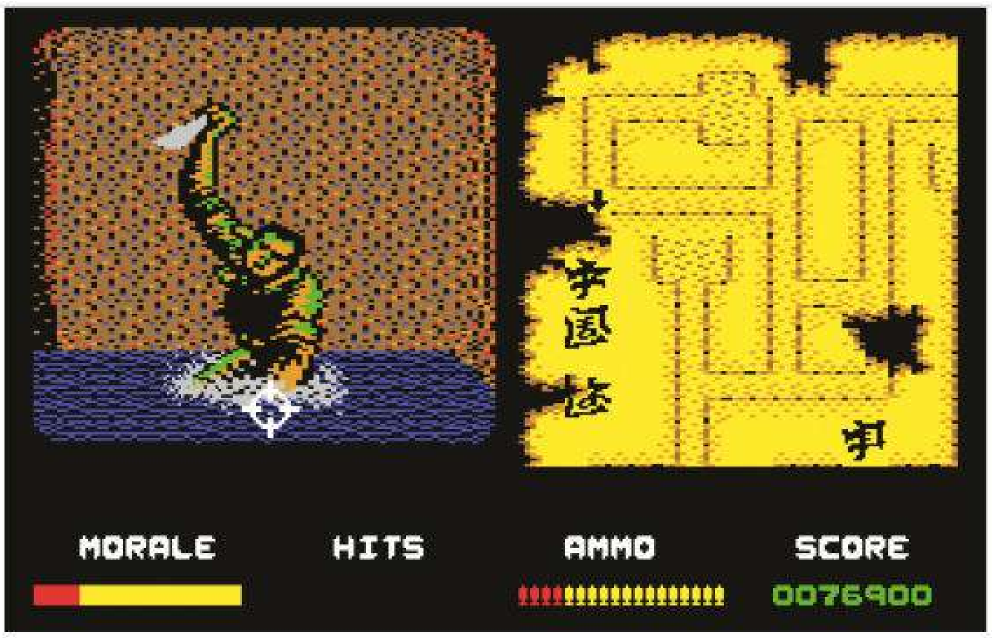
» An early image of David from *MicroHobby* magazine.

David Ward started Ocean Software with Jon Woods, although initially the company was known as Spectrum Games. In its early days Ocean specialised in creating clones of the popular arcade games of the time, but an early acquisition of the *Hunchback* licence made Ocean realise the importance an associated name could bring to its products and the studio became well-known for acquiring licences to popular films, TV shows and arcade games.

Licences didn't always mean quality however and early games like *Miami Vice*, *Knight Rider* and *Transformers* weren't always popular with critics. Ocean pressed on however and as its staff grew so did its talent and later licensed games like *RoboCop*, *Contra* and *Batman* proved to be just as much a hit with the press as original IPs like *Wizball*, *Head Over Heels* and *Where Time Stood Still*.

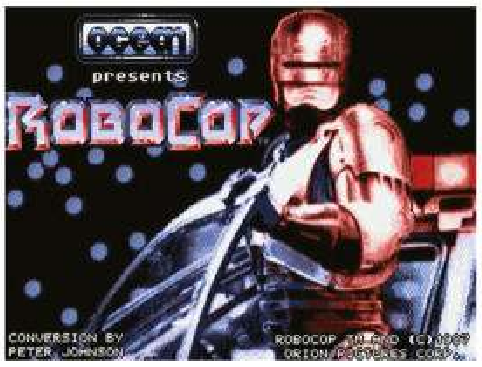
> "My teenage years would have certainly been very different had David not started Ocean"
> **MARK R JONES**

The Manchester-based developer was essential in the building of the early UK games industry and many of its past staff that we spoke to spoke highly of both David and Ocean Software. "While David rarely ventured down from the ivory towers above Ocean's dungeons to rub shoulders with the common folk, I still have fond memories of him," recalls artist Simon Butler. "He was sarcastic, as approachable as one would expect the boss to be, but without him, I would not be

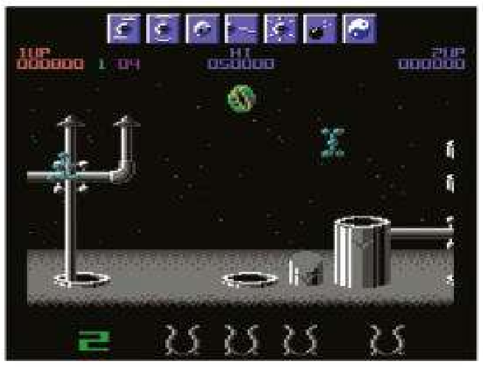


» [C64] *Platoon* was just one of many Ocean licences with lots of variety across its levels.

» David Ward from his appearance in a 1988 issue of *Your Business* magazine.


ocean
presents
RoboCop
CONVERSION BY PETER JOHNSON
ROBOCOP TM AND (C) 1987 ORION PICTURES CORP.

» [Atari ST] *RoboCop* was a gargantuan hit for Ocean, appearing on numerous formats.



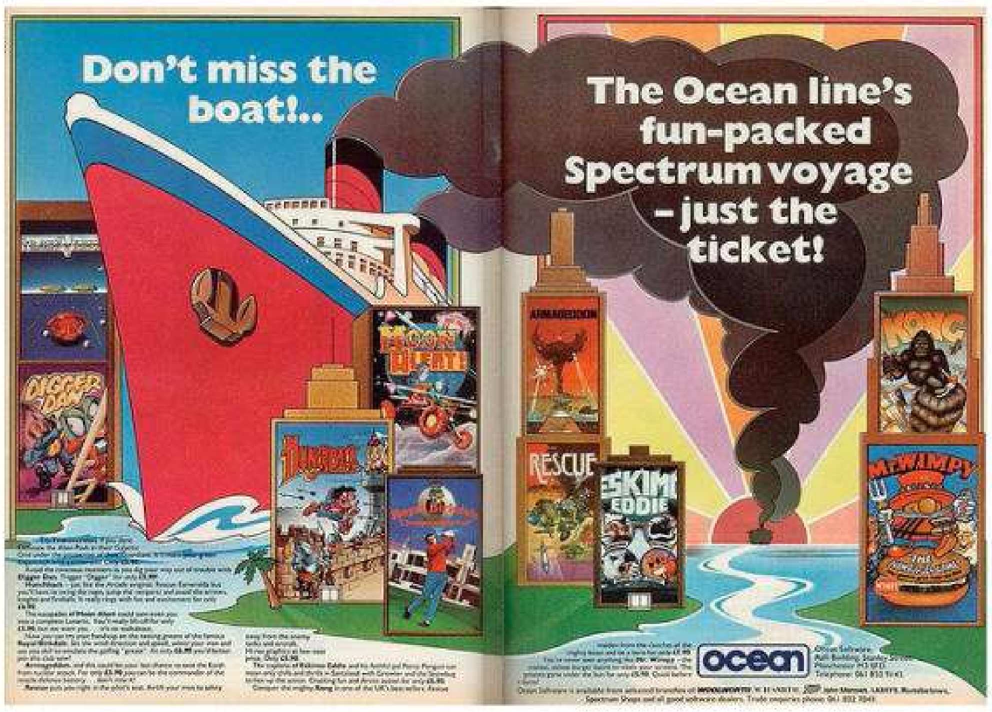
» [C64] Ocean published numerous original games like Sensible Software's *Wizball*.

where I am today. My two terms at Ocean, spanning ten years, were some of the finest, most annoying, exciting times one could hope for. Ocean was one of the foundation stones upon which a global empire was built. He was a major player in the start of the UK game development scene and will be greatly and rightfully missed."

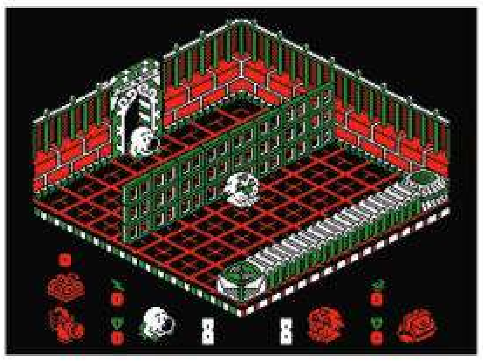
Mark R Jones, another Ocean artist, also remembers David. "As a teenager David Ward was the face of Ocean Software after I'd seen him in the *Commercial Breaks* documentary in 1984," he recalls. "We barely saw him down in the basement where all the games were made, but when he was in the vicinity he was always polite and in a good mood. The games of Ocean Software added so much to thousands of children's lives back in the Eighties. My teenage years would have certainly been very different had David not started Ocean. I, and all those gamers who played any of Ocean's games, shall remember him." Paul Hughes was a coder for Ocean Software and describes David as "my first 'proper' boss", going on to say, "I only had a few true interactions with him (mainly to do with new computers, tape piracy and his Porsche collection), but he was a keen listener and an incredibly astute businessman. Along with Jon Woods he kick-started the licensed games industry in the UK. Thanks for the best career start possible David, RIP."

Ocean Software was an incredibly important part of the UK's gaming scene in the early years and its impact is perhaps best summed up by David himself who wrote the forward for Retro Fusion's excellent book, *Ocean: The History*. "Ocean was a company very much of its time, it could only really have existed at the dawn of an era; the driving force behind its growth and importance was the necessary change and invention for its survival. It succeeded in bridging the chasm between an untrained, informal development resource and the requirements of sophisticated business finance, to invent a new industry and bring it to market."

David may no longer be with us but the impact of his company is still felt by gamers and the triumphs of Ocean Software often appear within this very magazine. The legacy he has left behind is truly impressive. Our thoughts go out to all of David's friends and family. *


Don't miss the boat!..
The Ocean line's fun-packed Spectrum voyage – just the ticket!
ocean

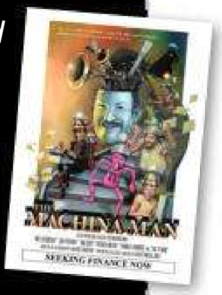
» An advert featuring early Ocean games, and yes, that's a licence for Wimpy.



» [Amstrad CPC] *Head Over Heels* proved that Ocean didn't just focus on licensed games.

MEL CROUCHER BIOPIC PLANNED

The writer and director Luther Bhogal-Jones is working with Faster Productions to finance a brand-new feature biopic highlighting the career of Mel Croucher. *The Machina Man* is currently looking for funding and plans to chart Croucher's early life, the founding of Automata and key titles such as *Pimania* and *Deus Ex Machina*. Its press release promises a visual style and tone for the feature biopic that will be "somewhere between the much loved Edgar Wright TV programme *Spaced* and Michael Winterbottom's Tony Wilson biopic *24 Hour Party People*". More news as we get it.

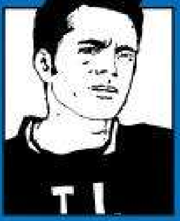


EA DITCHES FIFA

The *New York Times* recently revealed that negotiations between Electronic Arts and FIFA to extend the popular football series have ended without a new agreement in place. *FIFA* games have been part of the gaming landscape since the Nineties so it's going to be interesting to see how gamers react to *EA Sports FC*, the new name for EA's football games going forward. Could this move spark a renaissance in football games with FIFA teaming up with multiple third-party developers? We'll just have to wait and see.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. Join him as he hosts a phone-in show and plays games at www.twitch.tv/iainlee and also check out www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

If I can dream(cast)



The weird thing about being famous is the more famous you get, the more free stuff you can blag.

I used to be famous. That's not me showing off, it's just true. I did a TV show starting in 1999 called *The 11 O'Clock Show*. A rather rude show that made some of its stars actual proper millionaire movie famous. I just had a slightly famous glow, and that was enough for me.

Before that show, I was signing on, massively in debt and living with my mum. This was the last roll of the dice for me, and I got lucky. It was also my first instance of blagging stuff.

I remember sitting in the office and someone telling me that Richard Bacon, then hosting *The Big Breakfast*, had been given the brand-new console from Sega for free. I spent an hour with the team trying to ascertain whether I was as big as Bacon. We all agreed I wasn't but I might just be big enough to get a free Dreamcast. I was too scared to call, so my friend Leo, who was fearless, phoned Sega. She put the phone down and was beaming. "You got one." Insane.

A console was dispatched that day and after filming the show, I was bang on *ChuChu Rocket!*, *Phantasy Star Online* and *Ready 2 Rumble*.

From that moment on, I have loved the Dreamcast. Whenever I'm asked about my fave console, it's always that. Everything about it is perfect. First off, it looks so cool. The shape, the four sockets at the front, the power light. It's a stunning piece. Name a console that looks better, go on, I'll wait.

I also really dig the controller. I know a lot of people find it clunky, awkward and difficult to handle. I strongly disagree. It's solid. The slots for the rumble pack and the VMU, seemed so exciting. The advertising was also excellent. Without Googling it, I seem to remember it saying something like it had the potential for six-billion gamers. Oh, and of course the cases the games came in? Beautiful. Solid things with that wonderful blue spine.

I really believed the DC was going to be THE console. But then… the PS2 came out and killed it. Sony's advertising was enough to hypnotise an entire generation into thinking they needed it more than the DC. Promises of an Emotion Engine chip and a game called *The Bouncer* put off almost everyone from spending their dosh on Sega. The problem was, there were hardly any decent games for the first 18 months. There were only so many times you could watch that fireworks demo. Oh, and when *The Bouncer* came out, it was bloody awful.

In case you're wondering, I did blag a PS2. It was a Japanese import and I blew it up the first time I used it by not using a power converter. Ah well.

My Dreamcast is a real treasure to me. I've had it modded so it has HDMI and has a few other tricks under the hood that I won't bother you with now. It's also the only retro console my kids love. Sitting playing *ChuChu Rocket!* with them over 20 years after it was released is pure travel. The PS2, they couldn't care less about, Emotion Engine chip or not. ✱

> "I believed that the DC was going to be THE console. But then. . . the PS2 came out and killed it"

Dreamcast
POWER
OPEN

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:
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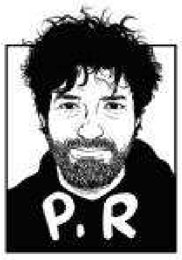
Who is Paul Rose?

Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser.* These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Rock stars wanted



Generally speaking, the games industry has never produced rock stars. I don't mean literal rock stars – though I guess Tommy Tallarico comes close – but the gaming equivalent. You could never imagine Shigeru Miyamoto throwing a TV out of a window, or licking an interviewer's face.

Where are gaming's untouchable icons – the Keith Richardses, or Bowies? The rebels, the eccentrics, the revolutionaries… the ones with a touch of otherness about them?

Certainly, the games media did its best to turn Matthew Smith into a sort of gaming bad boy back in the day. Then you've had the odd outlier such as Richard 'Lord British' Garriott, creator of the *Ultima* series. Admittedly, he dressed as a king and swanned around in flouncy shirts like he'd just stepped out of a Led Zeppelin video, but he did once sell vials of his own blood. The jury is out as to whether that constitutes rock-n'-roll behaviour or is just plain disgusting.

Regardless, the insular nature of games development – and the sorts of characters it attracts – doesn't appear to lend itself to big, bold, in-your-face characters. Not so the games magazines I grew up reading.

Not so long ago, I got followed on Twitter by one Rich Pelley. When it happened I had a genuine moment of breathlessness. You might not recognise the name, but to a generation of us who read *Your Spectrum*/*Your Sinclair*, Rich Pelley is a name that often cropped up in its pages, alongside Teresa 'T'Zer' Maughan, Phil 'Snouty' South, and countless others. He was, oddly, a hero of mine.

You see, *Your Sinclair* was *my* games mag. It was irreverent, disrespectful, silly… and a huge influence on my own writing when it came to Digitiser. Its writers became, in a weird way, friends. They were a gang I felt a part of, but a gang that I could never really be cool enough to join. Rich Pelley and I may not have met – and even though I followed him back on Twitter we still haven't exchanged so much as a hello – but I feel I kind of knew him, sort of. Ish.

> "It was irreverent, disrespectful, silly. . . and a huge influence on my own writing when it came to Digitiser"

To a ZX Spectrum-obsessed youth, the writers of *Your Sinclair* were my rock stars. They seemed to be in it just to have as much fun as possible, and in the same way that many of music's hell-raisers join a band as a means to an end, so it seemed with *Your Sinclair.*

I suppose to some of our readers, Digitiser had a similar feel. Mr Biffo's failed attempt at anonymity gave Digi a certain sense of mystique, I guess, and helped build the legend, but a few years before I'd been on the other side of that. I even once got a bit too excited at seeing *C&VG* icon Julian 'Jaz' Rignall in London's Oxford Street.

Rightly or wrong, these people were my gaming rock stars, more than any actual games creator. They taught me that games writing could be entertaining in and of itself, that you could lean into what games were there for: fun. And you could have fun while doing it.

And by 'fun' I obviously mean 'throwing a Teletext editing terminal out of a hotel room window'. ✱

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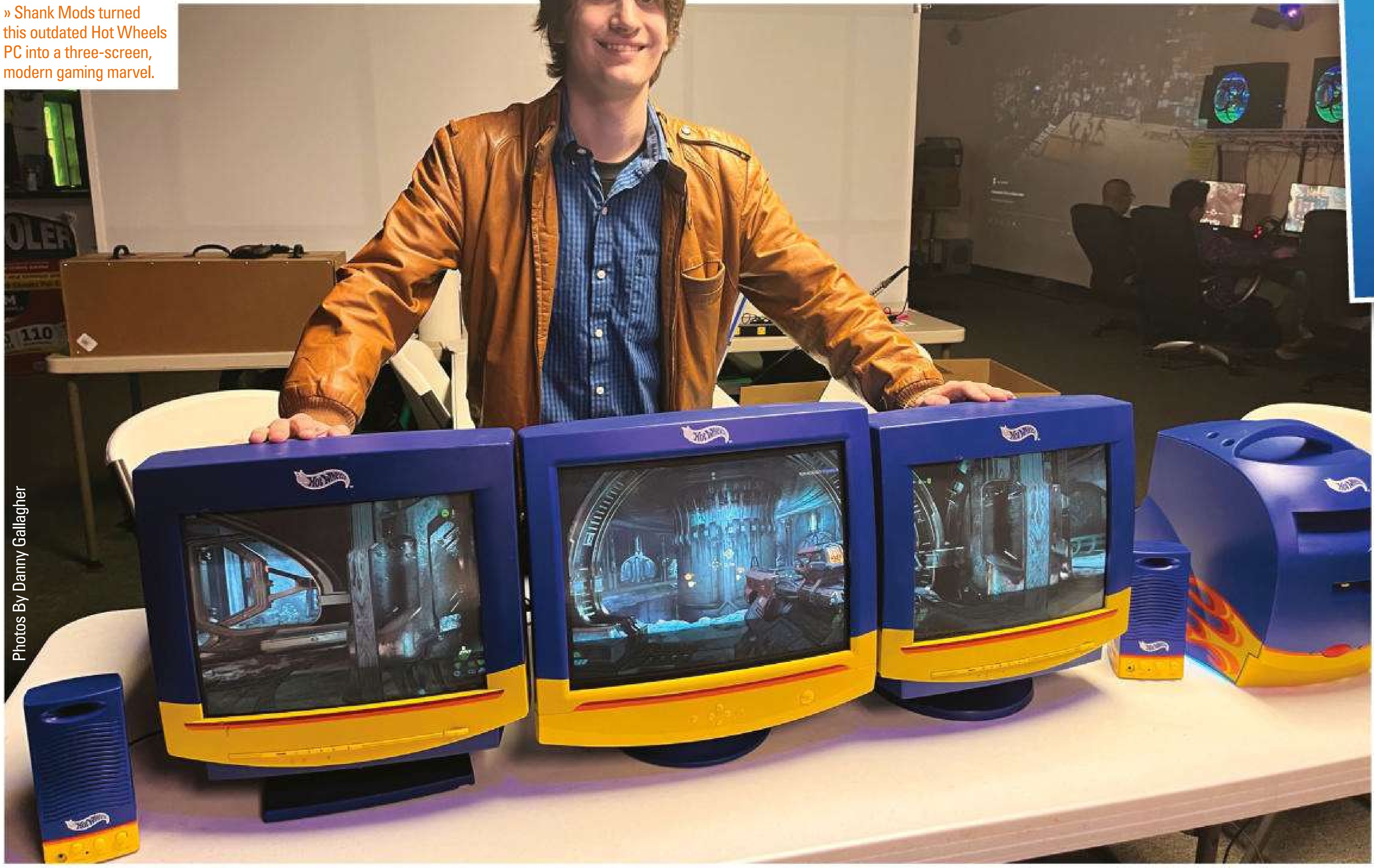
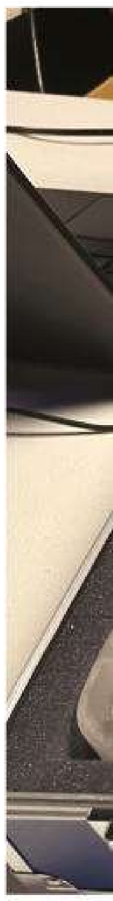


» Shank Mods turned this outdated Hot Wheels PC into a three-screen, modern gaming marvel.

Photos By Danny Gallagher



» Shank solders some ribbon to fix a crack in the motherboard of a Hot Wheels monitor.

Shank Mods

Meet the Texas console modder who's fascinated with retro tech

Shank Mods of Arlington, Texas scavenged the pieces for Patriot's Hot Wheels computer and turned it into a 'sleeper PC' with lightning-fast parts that can connect to three Hot Wheels monitors at once. He's also built a Nintendo GameCube-inspired Joy-Con for the Nintendo Switch that mimics the look and feel of the beloved Nintendo controller. These two videos alone have netted him at least 15 million views on YouTube (YouTube.com/ShankMods). Here we chat about his famous videos.

Did you know about the Hot Wheels PCs when you found them?

I'd heard about them. I was into CRT [cathode ray tube] monitor collecting and one of my buddies was talking about some of their favourite ones, [including] the character ones like SpongeBob, Mickey Mouse and Hello Kitty. Someone was like, "Oh, the Batman one is the coolest," and someone's like, "The Batman one is not as cool as the Hot Wheels one." They showed me a picture and I'm like, "I'd love to own one of those one day because I just love the blue and the flames." It's just, like, so cool.

How did you find the Hot Wheels monitors and accessories you needed?

I saw the Hot Wheels PC in the summer of 2019 at the Computer Reset and [thought] there might be another one there. I kept bugging everyone like, "Keep an eye out

» One of Shank's first big modding hits was the Kill Mii, a portable Nintendo Wii made from an Altoids tin.

» Shank found the original steering wheel and pedal set for the Patriot Hot Wheels PC so they can play racing games just like they did in 1999.

» Shank runs to the Micro Center that sponsored his Hot Wheels PC build in his 'car'.

» Shank calls his GameCube-inspired Joy-Cons for the Nintendo Switch "a huge step up from regular Joy-Cons".

» Shank Mods has made several handheld versions of Nintendo consoles such as the Virtual Boy, the GameCube and the Wii.

> "I was on the fence because I wanted to keep my creative direction and not let them have a say in it"
>
> **SHANK MODS**

for it. Keep an eye out for me." I'd love to put a sleeper PC in there but I didn't have the budget to do it so I just slowly accumulated parts. Eventually, some of the guys in the Dallas/Fort Worth Retro Computing Community group actually came across them and let me know. Two people at the same time found one for me and another friend of mine was at a thrift store and this was long before I was planning on doing a video. They had a full set of most of it but not the mouse and keyboard. They had the monitor and steering wheel set as is for like $70 or $80 and I was on the fence about it.

When did it eventually turn into a video project?

I posted about it on Twitter. I was like, "Here's the project I did." I didn't think much of it and a bunch of people are like, "Make a video out of it." I was talking with another YouTuber named Tech By Matt (youtube.com/TechByMattB) and he was saying with sponsorships, you could get parts to do this stuff. I was on the fence because I wanted to keep my creative direction and not let them have a say in it and I wasn't sure if they would give me all the parts I needed. Eventually, he was like, "Micro Center's cool to work with," so I hit them up.

I sent them a pitch and said we want to make this as crazy as possible and they were like, "Really? Do you really mean that?" I kept upping the building materials. A friend of mine and I just sat and thought what's the most expensive hardware we can throw in this that their store sells? It just kept slowly rising up and they [Micro Center] never said no. So I'm like, "OK, this is too cool to pass up." It seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a really dumb project with a big budget.

How long did the build take from that point?

It was really difficult because this was during the huge chip shortage. It took a while for us to actually have a manufacturer [EVGA] make a small-form factor card. Once they did that, I measured the clearance and it barely fit. It was less than one millimetre [laughs].

I remember in the video that physically putting all the tech in and finding the space for it seemed like the two biggest problems. The other big thing was tracking the stuff down because a few YouTube channels had made videos on them. So eBay sellers had false expectations for prices. Nobody's buying them other than me because they're trash [laughs].

So you put it out there. What was the response like?

Reception was really good at first. It started off slow, very slow compared to my other videos and then it started to dip. Then it took off again. I was worried in the beginning it wasn't gonna take off because basically all of my other projects are all Nintendo stuff and this was my first time doing a project that wasn't modding a Nintendo console. It was a little worrying but it took off and became the second best performing video I had. People really loved it and the reception was definitely better than I expected.

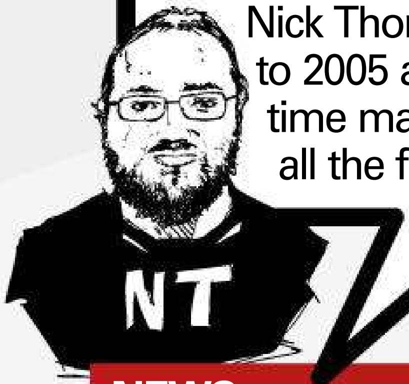
How does this compare with your other videos? Is there one build that's gotten the most views?

Definitely the GameCube Joy-Cons by far. That one has got like 11 million views so it was probably three to four times more popular than my second and it just keeps going. The algorithm pushes it out like crazy. I didn't expect it to be as big as it was but I knew making it and after I finished this video, it doesn't matter what I follow up with next. This will stay the most popular video of mine. Maybe I'll eat my words one day.

Special thanks to Shadow LAN of Richardson, Texas, for letting us use its facility to take photos of Shank for this feature.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

SEPTEMBER 2005 – With a dearth of quality game releases, the focus is on hardware – this time a new controller and a handheld that everyone except Darran has been waiting for. Nick Thorpe sets the dial to 2005 and fires up the time machine to see what all the fuss is about



» Eager gamers picked up PSPs in their masses at HMV's midnight launch in London.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 2005

After months of feverish anticipation, the PSP launched in Europe on 1 September and quickly made a major impact by becoming the UK's fastest-selling games console ever. Over 185,000 consoles were sold during the system's first four days of availability, more than double the previous record of 87,000 units, which had been set by the Nintendo DS earlier in the year. The system dominated software sales too, with the excellent *Ridge Racer* claiming the top spot in the all-formats chart. With hardware sales alone generating £33 million for Sony, Nintendo's dominance of the handheld gaming market faced a true challenge for the first time in a long time.

Nintendo used the Tokyo Game Show as its venue to finally reveal the controller for its forthcoming console – still codenamed Revolution – and it was a truly unorthodox offering. The wireless controller resembled a TV remote, and was intended to be used with just one hand, though attachments such as an analogue stick could be held in the other. Most intriguingly, the controller's internal gyroscope and infra red sensor would allow for the controller to detect motion and be used as a pointer. Nintendo president Satoru Iwata stated that, "The feeling is so natural and real, as soon as players use the controller, their minds will spin with the possibilities of how this will change gaming as we know it today."

Notable UK game releases were thin on the ground this month. Falcom's RPG sequel *Ys: The Ark Of Napishtim* was the joint best-scoring game in *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, earning 7/10 as the reviewer felt it "succeeds as a lightweight genre taster". That view wasn't shared by *games™*, which awarded the "clichéd, tedious, frustrating nonsense" 3/10. *Gametrak: Real World Golf*, which used wrist straps attached to a motion control device, also earned 7/10 from *Official PS2*. *Play* scored this 81%, noting that, "The level of skill you need to develop in order to get good at In2Games' golf sim

» Is Satoru Iwata's presentation pointer malfunctioning? Nope – he's showing off the Revolution controller.

» [GameCube] Reviewers quite liked good old Hulk, which is surprising given how angry he is.

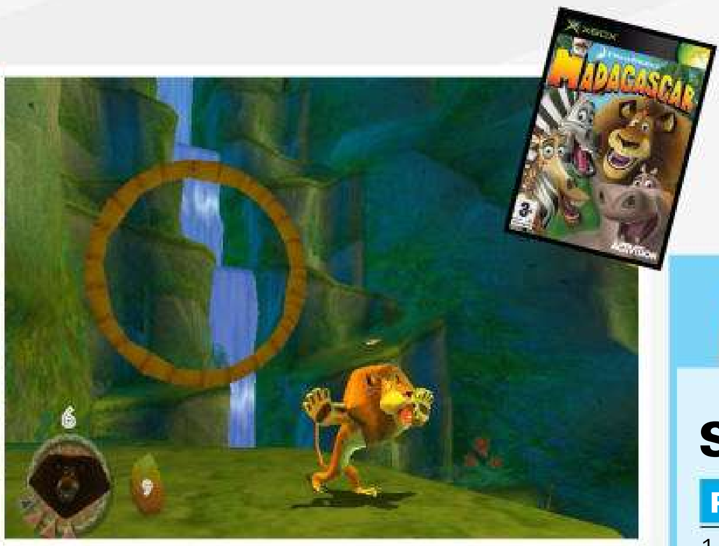
NEWS SEPTEMBER 2005

Mandala Airlines Flight 091 crashed in Medan, Indonesia shortly after take off on 5 September, killing 100 passengers and 49 people on the ground. North Sumatra governor Rizal Nurdin and his predecessor Raja Inal Siregar both perished in the accident. An investigation concluded that the aircraft was improperly configured for take off due to crew error, leading to the crash.

On 8 September, News Corporation announced its intention to purchase IGN Entertainment for $650 million. The main IGN website covered videogames, films, TV, comics and more, and had originally been launched in 1996 by the American Future Publishing subsidiary Imagine Media, but was spun off into its own entity in 1999. The group's other online properties at the time of sale included AskMen.com, Rotten Tomatoes and the GameSpy network.

The German federal election took place on 18 September. The CDU/CSU won the most seats in the Bundestag with 35.2% of the vote – 1% more than the incumbent chancellor Gerhard Schroder's SPD. Due to Germany's proportional electoral system, no party had a majority of seats. Weeks of coalition negotiations eventually resulted in a grand coalition between the CDU/CSU and SPD, with CDU leader Angela Merkel to serve as chancellor.

» [Xbox] After a rough night, the wyverns unleash their vomit upon the unprepared human soldiers.



» [Xbox] This would appear to be a rubbish platform bit, rather than the apparently brilliant Tiki Golf.

» [PC] Coming in to land on some bland textures. Honestly, some screenshots almost defy captioning.

makes it a rewarding experience all round." *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* was the final 7/10 from *Official PS2*. It was described as "entertaining chaos" and a "festival of destruction" but also "surprisingly hard" and "sometimes irritating". *Official Xbox Magazine* liked it more, scoring it 8.5/10 and calling it, "The fastest, most frantic superhero title of late," but *XBM* felt it to be "a little one dimensional" and gave it 6/10. *NGC* felt it was "entertainingly destructive" and scored it 79%.

More multiplatform multimedia fun was to be found in the film tie-in *Madagascar*. *Cube* praised the "fun, light minigames that aren't too demanding" but didn't enjoy the "stale, generic platform gameplay". *Official Xbox* gave it 6.7/10 and *Official PS2* felt it was a "below average" 4/10. Naturally, *Madagascar* went straight to the top of the PS2 charts.

Over in the Xbox realm, *Official Xbox Magazine* awarded *Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes* 9.0/10 in an exclusive review. Though it offered "few fundamental changes" to the original game's hybrid of real-time tactics and hack-and-slash gameplay, it earned a high score due to being "remarkably deep" and having "massively improved" online play. Climax's motorbiking sequel *MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 3* earned 9.5/10 for being more of the same "plus loads of thrilling new tracks and the best graphics on Xbox". Nintendo fans didn't have an awful lot to get excited about this month, but strong import reviews for Skip's *Chibi-Robo!* and *Advance Wars: Dual Strike* suggested that GameCube and DS owners at least had something to look forward to.

Over on the PC, combat flight simulation *Falcon 4.0: Allied Force* earned top plaudits from *PC Gamer*, scoring 89% for being "the most realistic, most absorbing jet sim money can buy". The review praised the "sensational campaigns, superlative realism, impressive scaleability", but noted "rather warty" visuals and some complex systems which required "more intellectual effort than most arts degrees". Lastly, the top-scoring domestic release in *games™* was an odd one – the arcade game *OutRun 2 SP*, which earned 8/10. The reviewer felt that the game "eclipses its predecessor in every department" graphically, and praised the multiplayer racing as the "catch-up logic is superbly designed, meaning each race is furiously contested until the final corner".

Join us again next time, as the dawn of a new generation grows ever nearer. *

CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 2005

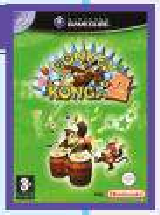
PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Madagascar (Activision)
2 – Destroy All Humans! (THQ)
3 – God Of War (Sony)
4 – Juiced (THQ)
5 – Medal Of Honor: European Assault (EA)

XBOX

1 – Destroy All Humans! (THQ)
2 – Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (Rockstar)
3 – Juiced (THQ)
4 – Medal Of Honor: European Assault (EA)
5 – Madagascar (Activision)

GAMECUBE

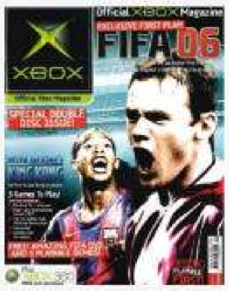


1 – Donkey Konga 2 (Nintendo)
2 – Resident Evil 4 (Capcom)
3 – Star Fox: Assault (Nintendo)
4 – Mario Power Tennis (Nintendo)
5 – Mario Party 6 (Nintendo)

MUSIC

1 – Don't Cha (Pussycat Dolls ft. Busta Rhymes)
2 – Dare (Gorillaz)
3 – Doctor Pressure (Mylo vs Miami Sound Machine)
4 – Fix You (Coldplay)
5 – Bad Day (Daniel Powter)

THIS MONTH IN…

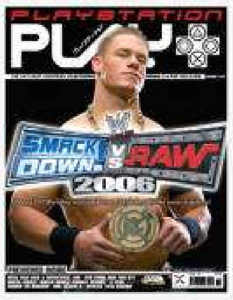


Official Xbox Magazine

Glasgow City Council is reportedly offering electronics as an incentive to eat healthily, and thus a scheme is hatched. "If you're a lard arse and want a free Xbox, move to Glasgow, eat enough lettuce to earn points, and then spend those points on goodies." Genius.

Cube

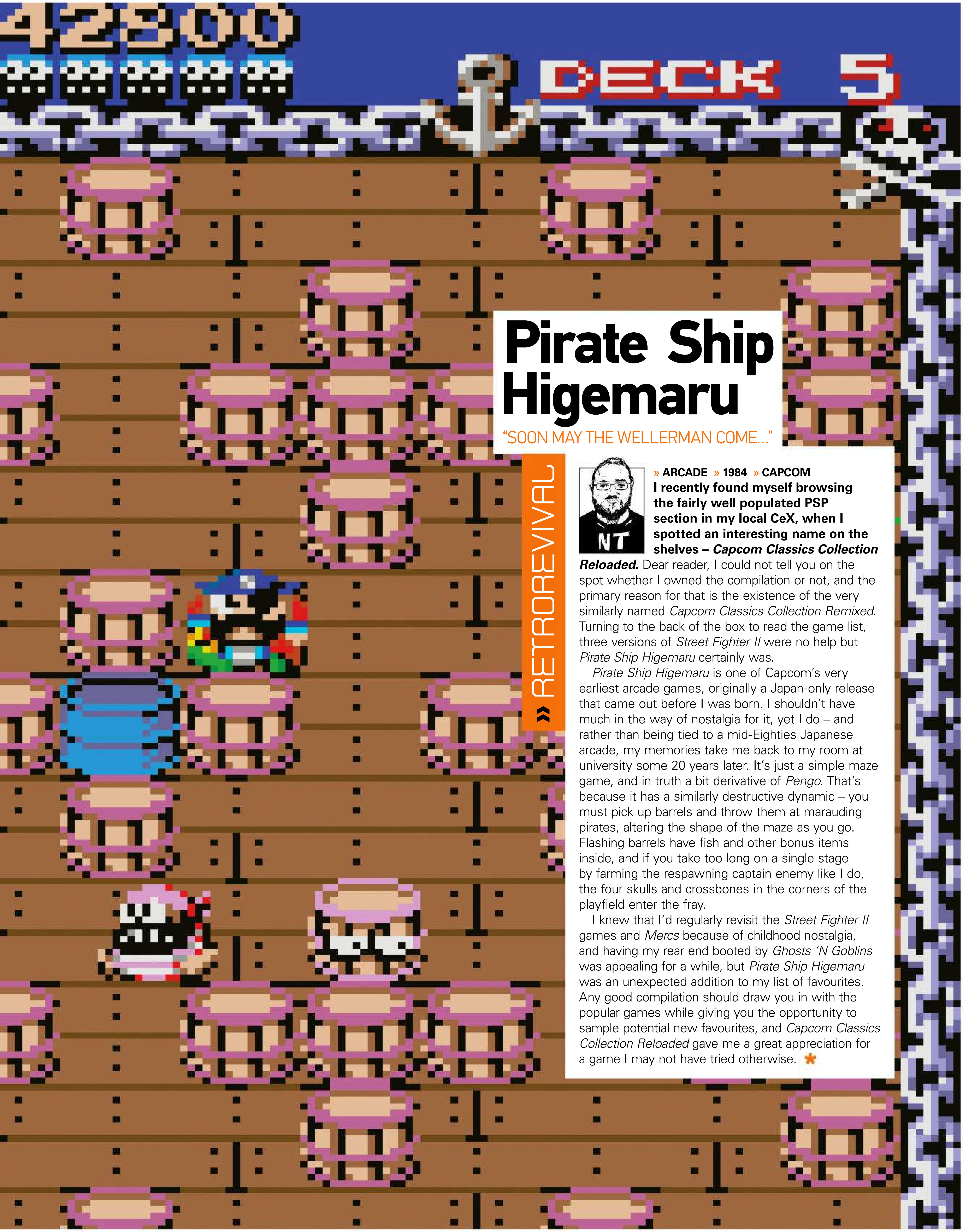
Jon Denton, *games™* newcomer, bets Ryan King can't sink a hole in one playing *Madagascar*'s Tiki Golf minigame. "Even funnier is the fact that because he's only just started he's skint, but even funnier than that is the fact he honoured his debt and wrote Ryan an IOU," reports Tim.



Play

"The movie based on Iron Man will be out in 2007 […] which means *Iron Man* will be a PS3 game," says Will Johnston. "That's plenty of power for a poorly realised licensed game to get totally drowned in." It scored 58% in issue 166.

1UP
42800
TOP



Pirate Ship Higemaru

“SOON MAY THE WELLERMAN COME…”

» ARCADE » 1984 » CAPCOM

I recently found myself browsing the fairly well populated PSP section in my local CeX, when I spotted an interesting name on the shelves – *Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded*. Dear reader, I could not tell you on the spot whether I owned the compilation or not, and the primary reason for that is the existence of the very similarly named *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed*. Turning to the back of the box to read the game list, three versions of *Street Fighter II* were no help but *Pirate Ship Higemaru* certainly was.

Pirate Ship Higemaru is one of Capcom’s very earliest arcade games, originally a Japan-only release that came out before I was born. I shouldn’t have much in the way of nostalgia for it, yet I do – and rather than being tied to a mid-Eighties Japanese arcade, my memories take me back to my room at university some 20 years later. It’s just a simple maze game, and in truth a bit derivative of *Pengo*. That’s because it has a similarly destructive dynamic – you must pick up barrels and throw them at marauding pirates, altering the shape of the maze as you go. Flashing barrels have fish and other bonus items inside, and if you take too long on a single stage by farming the respawning captain enemy like I do, the four skulls and crossbones in the corners of the playfield enter the fray.

I knew that I’d regularly revisit the *Street Fighter II* games and *Mercs* because of childhood nostalgia, and having my rear end booted by *Ghosts ’N Goblins* was appealing for a while, but *Pirate Ship Higemaru* was an unexpected addition to my list of favourites. Any good compilation should draw you in with the popular games while giving you the opportunity to sample potential new favourites, and *Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded* gave me a great appreciation for a game I may not have tried otherwise. *

THE STORY OF SONIC™ ORIGINS

BEFORE CREATING SONIC MANIA, SOME OF ITS DEVELOPERS PROVED THEIR SKILLS WITH REMASTERS OF THE CLASSIC MEGA DRIVE GAMES. NOW COLLECTED AND ENHANCED, WITH A BRAND-NEW PORT OF SONIC 3 & KNUCKLES TO BOOT, SIMON THOMLEY EXPLAINS WHAT WENT INTO MAKING THE LATEST AND POSSIBLY GREATEST SONIC COMPILATION

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

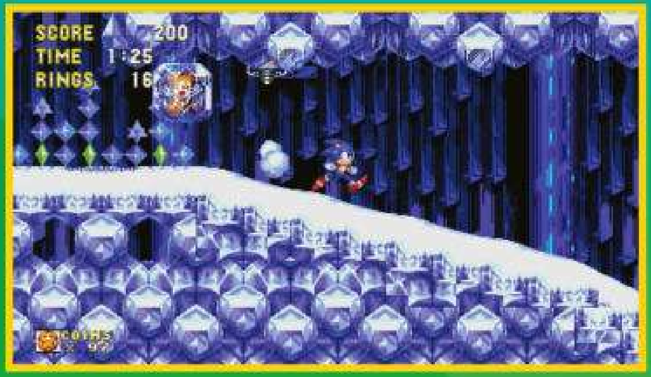
When it comes to making back catalogue products widely and easily available, few companies in gaming do as good a job as Sega. This consistency does have an ironic side effect though – where other companies draw praise for bringing back games which have spent decades in the vault, Mega Drive games are so easy to pick up that Sega has actually drawn criticism for the frequency with which it reissues them. In fact, we'd bet a few of you are wondering why you should be excited for a new *Sonic* compilation, especially if there's a copy of *Sonic Jam* or *Sonic Mega Collection* sitting on your shelves.

So, what does *Sonic Origins* offer that other *Sonic* compilations don't already have? As it turns out, quite a bit. For a start, none of the games are emulated, instead ported using the Retro Engine created by long-term Sonic fan Christian Whitehead, known in the community as The Taxman. Why does that matter? We asked Simon Thomley, who is well known to fans as Stealth, the author of projects including the SonED level-editing utility and the *Knuckles In Sonic 1* mod, as well as the leader of the *Sonic Megamix* mod team. Now leading Headcannon Games, he was a programmer on some of the past remaster projects, *Sonic Mania* and now *Sonic Origins*.

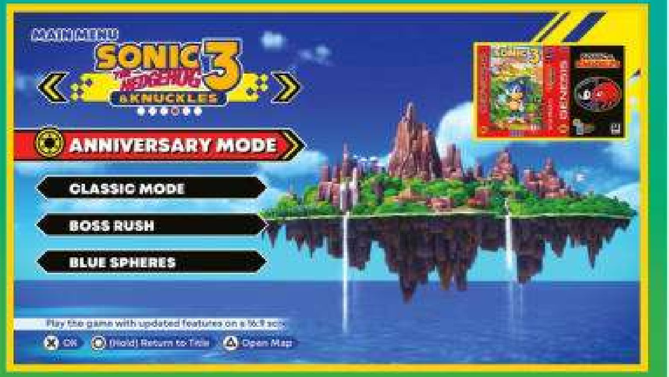
"A good emulator can easily trump a bad port job, but if you have access to people with the right talent and motivation, they may be able to create something very accurate to the original," Simon tells us. "A version built for modern hardware can also provide portable and more-easily maintainable code, which can make it easier to add features that didn't exist or were even impossible on the original platform." Long-term fans will be well aware of the engine's potential thanks to its use in the mobile remasters of *Sonic CD, Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Sonic 2*. These offered 16:9 widescreen support in all three games, new characters and moves, and even improved performance and new stages.

While that port of *Sonic CD* eventually made its way to more traditional platforms, this is the first time the other two have been available on consoles and PC. *Sonic Origins* offers updated versions of those remasters, now incorporating the Drop Dash move from *Sonic Mania* and a new Mirror mode, as well as the Anniversary mode. This gives players infinite lives and the ability to collect coins, which are used to unlock museum content and retry failed special stages.

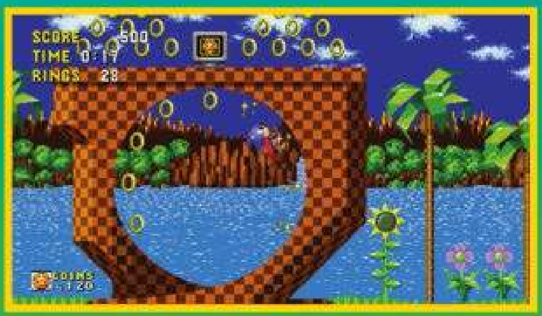
Sonic Origins also includes a brand-new remaster of *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*, which is arguably the best feature of all. This compilation marks the first time since 2011 that Sega has reissued the fan-favourite game, with many speculating that this odd state of affairs was due to legal issues arising from *Sonic 3*'s inclusion of music composed by Michael Jackson's songwriters. Regardless of any behind-the-scenes wrangling, fans will doubtless be thrilled to see the return of what is arguably the greatest *Sonic* game. ▶



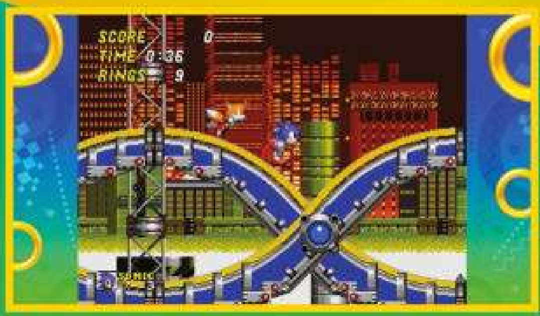
» [PC] *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* is back for the first time in years, and now it is in widescreen.



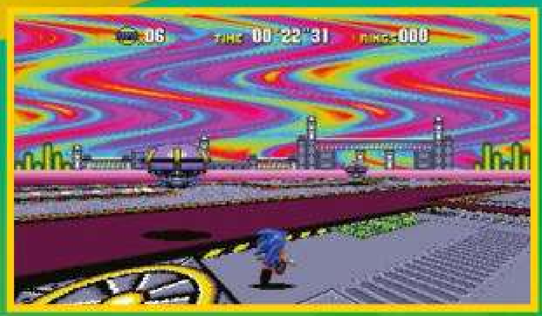
» [PC] Additional modes like Boss Rush and the Blue Spheres minigame are available too.


SCORE
TIME
RINGS

» [PC] You'll notice the extra life on top of the loop has been replaced with a coin monitor.

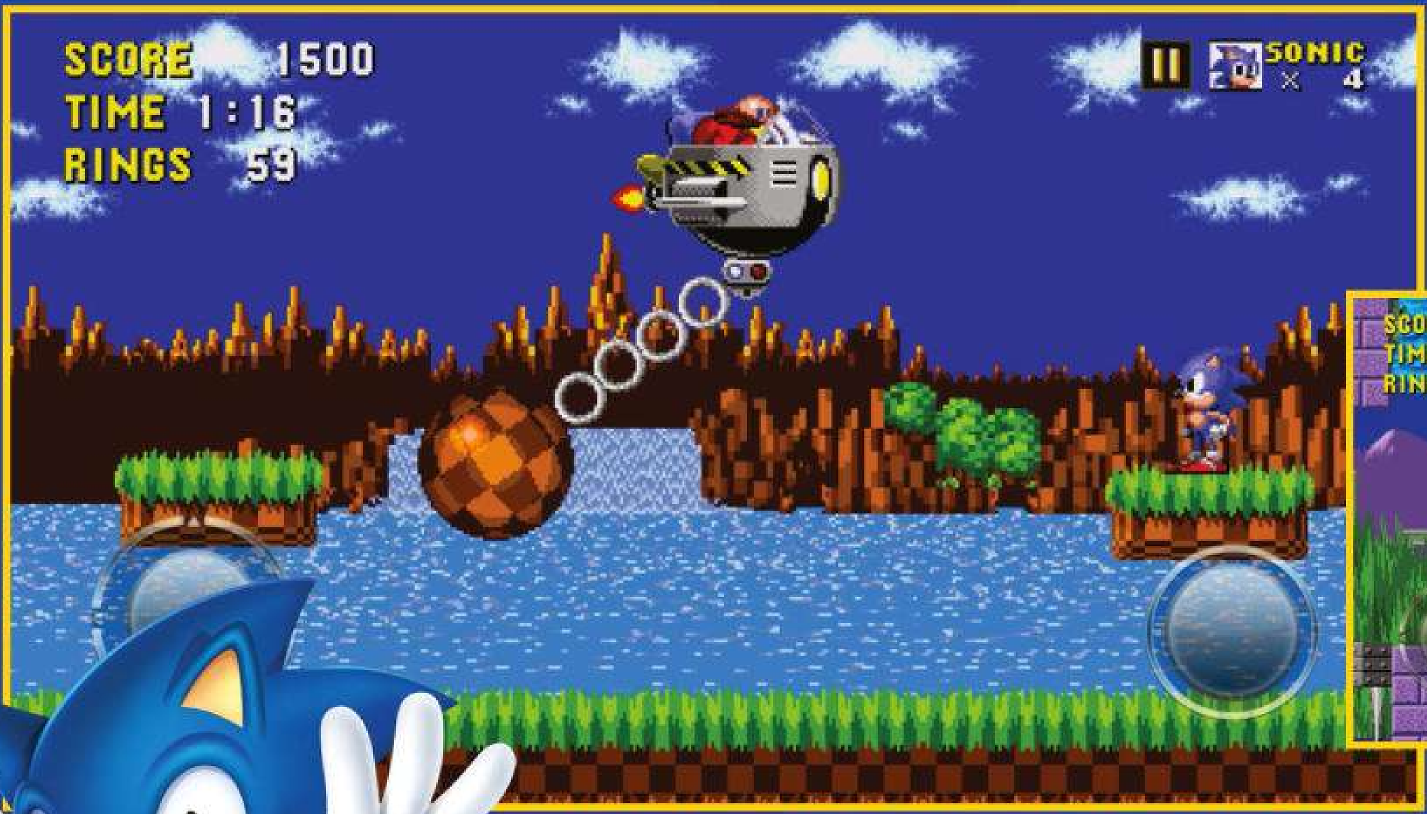

SCORE
TIME
RINGS

» [PC] If you prefer limited lives and 4:3 gameplay, Classic mode is there for you.

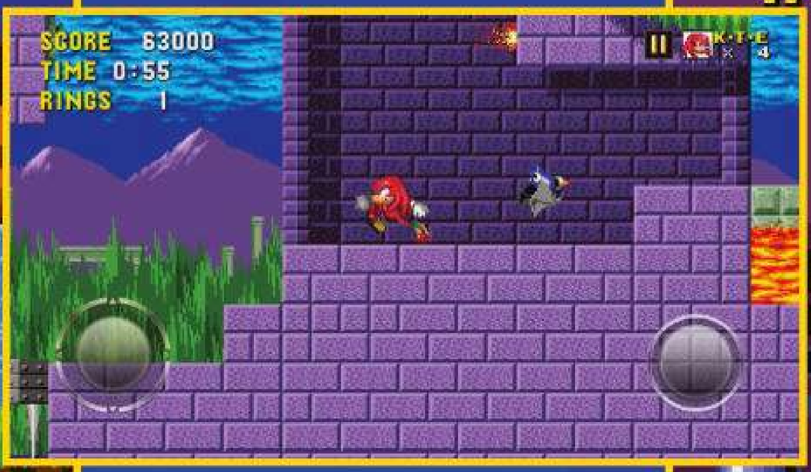

TIME 00'22"31
RING 000

» [PC] All games take advantage of modern hardware for 60fps gameplay and save-game support.

» Simon Thomley, independent game developer, Headcannon.



» [iOS] The introduction of a 16:9 display in the remaster resulted in some subtle gameplay changes.



» [iOS] Readers who know the first game inside out will recognise this as a new area.

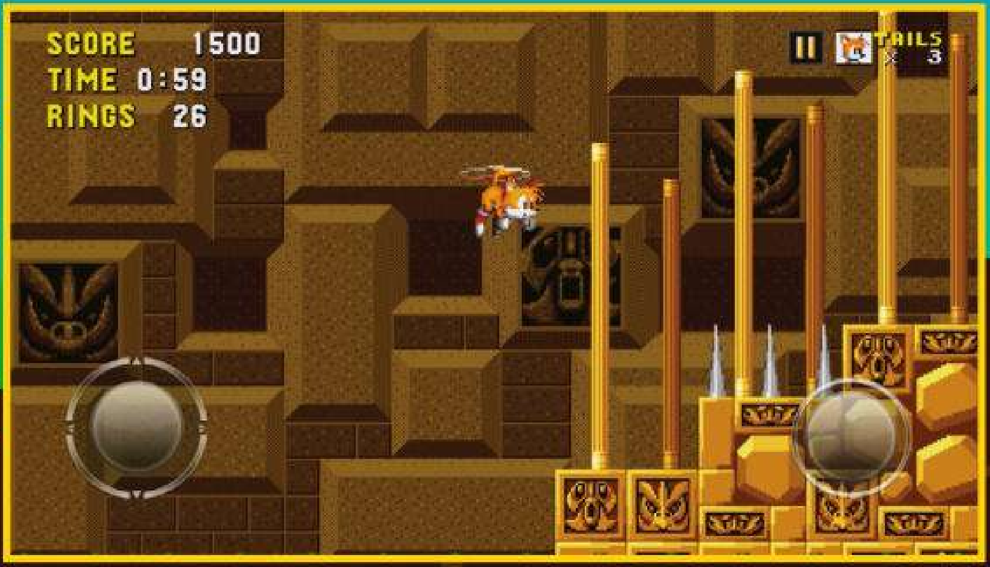
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

THE HEDGEHOG'S FIRST OUTING MIGHT BE A MULTI-MILLION SELLING PHENOMENON, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT COULDN'T BENEFIT FROM A LITTLE SPRUCING UP. HERE'S HOW SOME OF THE INEVITABLE EARLY INSTALMENT WEIRDNESS WAS IRONED OUT

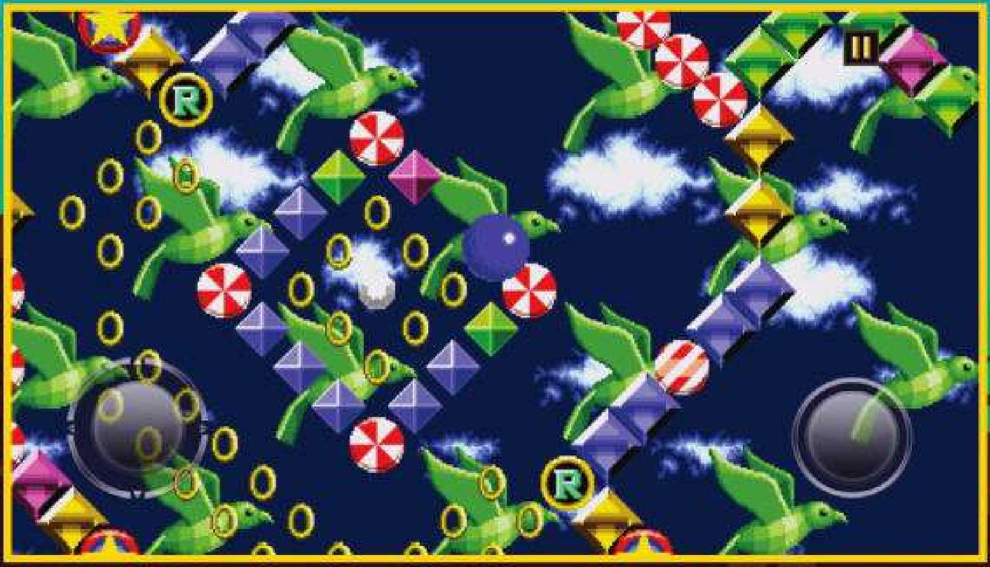
So much has been made of Sonic's commercial and cultural importance as a character that it's easy to forget that *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a revolutionary game. "The bright, surrealistic visuals certainly caught my attention when I first saw it on display 31 years ago, but it was the speed and physics-based gameplay that had me instantly hooked," says Simon. "There was something special about the team that came together to make this game that not only launched this sort of experimental concept into a massively successful franchise, but also helped *Sonic 1* remain a solid entry to this day. My admiration for them and what they had done is what truly began me on my career path." Indeed, if you weren't fortunate enough to experience the game in the early Nineties, it can be hard to appreciate the impact of seemingly simple additions such as the natural slopes and curves in level designs.

Removed from that original context and seen as part of a complete body of work, the original game can seem a bit plain and sometimes difficult. Players who started with the later games often struggle with Sonic's debut due to the lack of the Spin Dash move, and that's something that many later releases have sought to address, *Sonic Origins* included. "Many issues come from the relative difficulty in gaining speed to traverse curves and dodge hazards," says Simon. "The Spin Dash will give less-experienced players a quick boost to speed around obstacles and away from hazards. In *Origins*, the Drop Dash is an even zippier and [more] stylish option available when playing as Sonic."

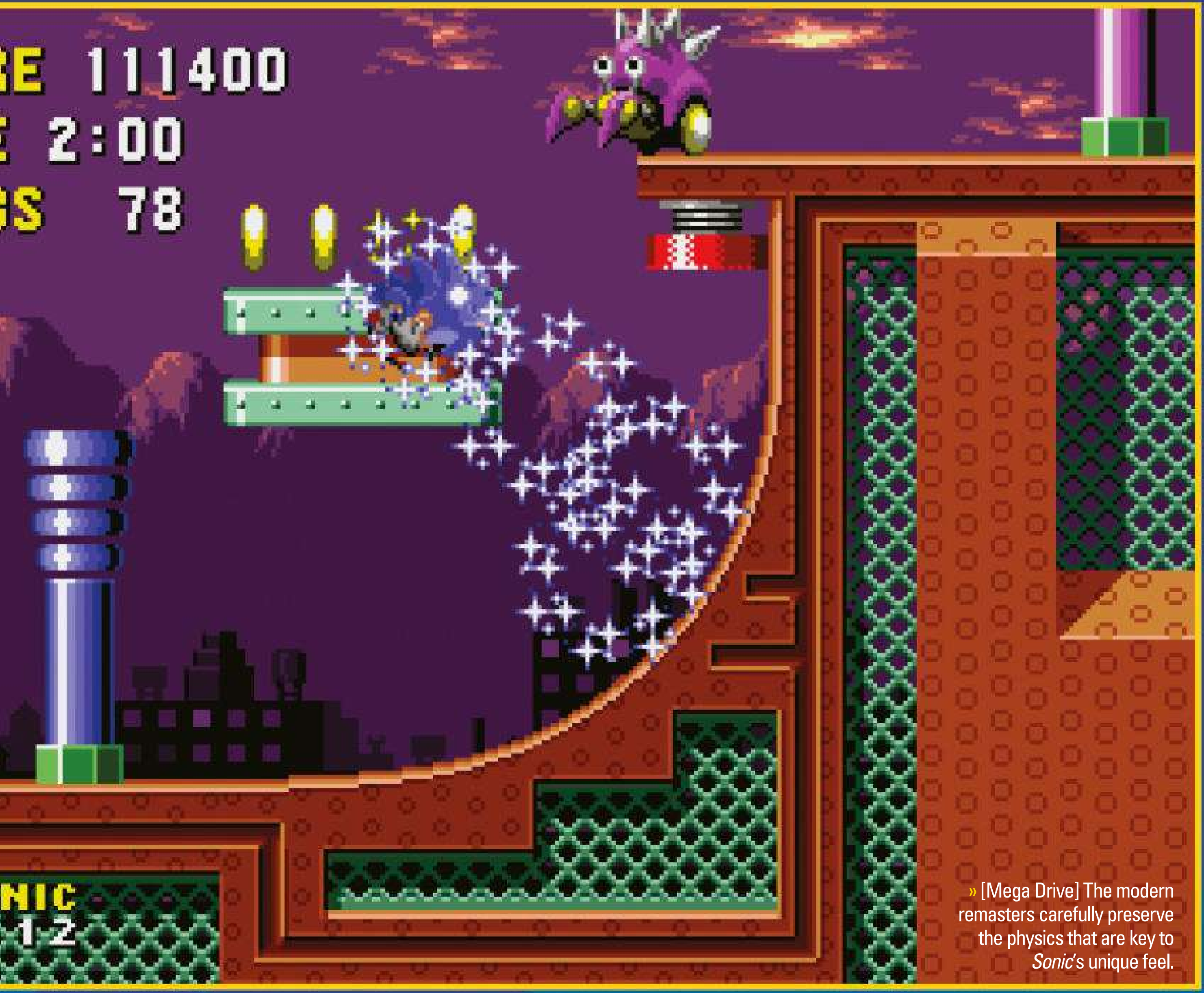
Adding Tails and Knuckles was another way in which *Sonic 1*'s remaster attempts to bridge the gap between the games, and doing so necessitated a fair amount of extra work. "The two most important conditions for including them were that Tails and Knuckles behave exactly as they should, and in doing so, they don't find or create any issues. That's why we combed the entire game using a special utility that was created to make the many necessary changes to each level's collision," Simon explains. "There was a lot of terrain that Sonic couldn't even touch in the original version without cheating, so these areas didn't need to be filled in completely with collision or even graphics. Since Tails and Knuckles could reach these places, though, we added or modified any solidity as needed, and even cleaned up some tile graphics and added alternate paths or bonus rooms to empty spaces where Sonic would never notice the difference."



» [iOS] Tails can easily fly to a route that normally requires an obscure secret to access.



» [iOS] Modern hardware allows for the special stages to rotate far more smoothly in the remaster.

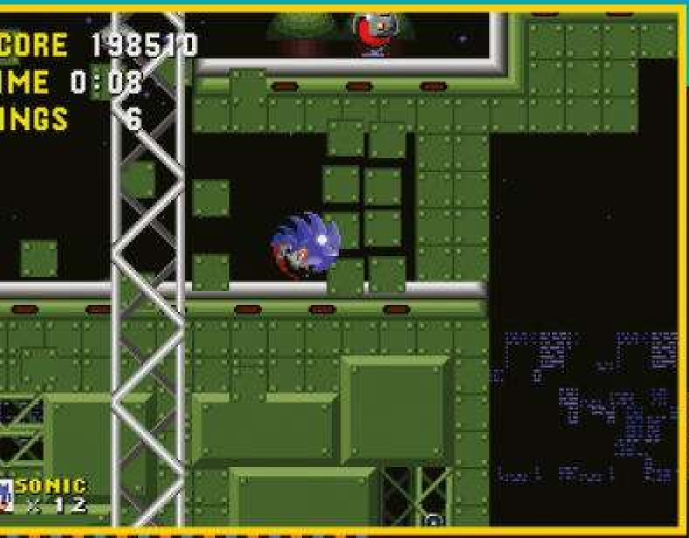


» [Mega Drive] The modern remasters carefully preserve the physics that are key to *Sonic*'s unique feel.

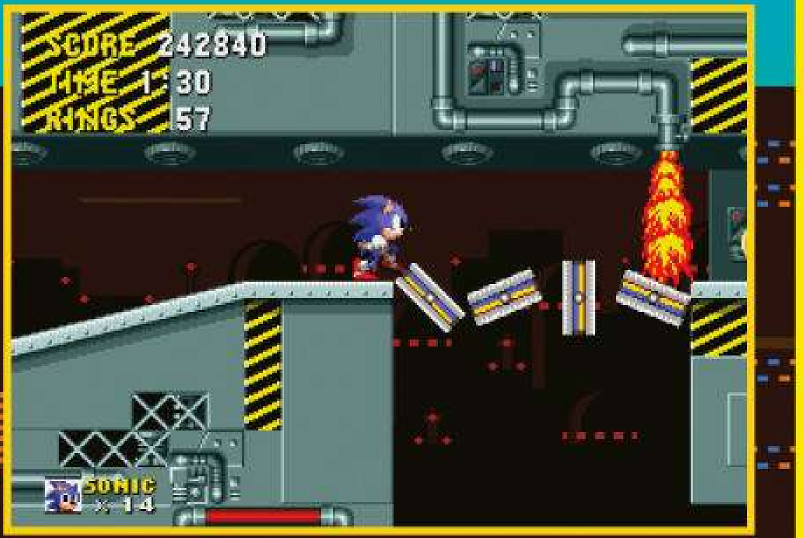
Some physics changes were also made to bring the experience in-line with later games. For example, in the original release, Sonic has a speed cap that doesn't exist in later games. "The difference in physics is primarily a quirk in the original game's input programming that, in short, seems to have been unintentional," Simon tells us. "With Sega's blessing, we omitted this 'speed cap' from the remade version, though there is still a hidden menu command to enable it if you like!" Likewise, in the Mega Drive original, spikes can repeatedly damage Sonic without temporary invincibility kicking in. "Placement and the game's code indicate that the double-hit was intentional, but later games used spikes in a different way that, in retrospect, made this behaviour seem inconsistent," says Simon. "Players will certainly have an easier time navigating them with the updated behaviour, though, and the double-hit can still be re-enabled by a hidden command too!"

While many players will appreciate how widescreen display shows threats slightly earlier, implementing it required some careful consideration. "The fixed-screen boss arenas certainly presented a challenge in updating the games for 16:9. Our goal was to preserve the intent of the encounter in the least intrusive way," recalls Simon. "For the Green Hill boss, the natural environment didn't lend well to artificial barriers, so we adjusted the distance between platforms and the speed of the boss in a way that preserved its timing with the least impact on gameplay. Conversely, leaving empty ledges around or even adding more blocks to the Spring Yard Zone encounter would have had a major impact on its difficulty, so we took advantage of the artificial terrain by adding an extending mechanical barrier."

Now that it behaves more like its sequels, we'd be unsurprised if *Sonic Origins* results in a new appreciation for Sonic's first outing.



» [Mega Drive] Breakable walls will be easier to get through thanks to the Spin Dash and Drop Dash.



» [Mega Drive] Anniversary mode's infinite lives will be appreciated by players who struggle with tricky sections like this.

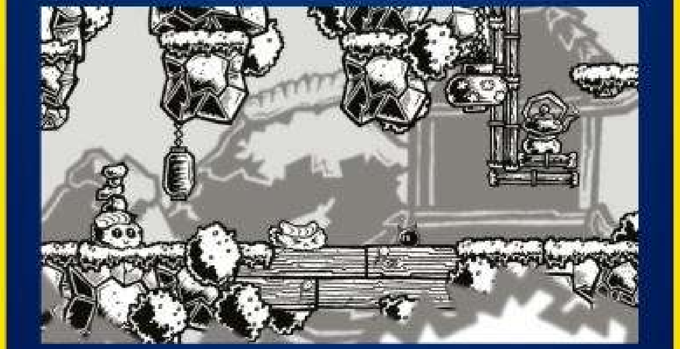
GO WITH THE FLOW

INDIE DEVELOPER JAY X TRENT EXPLAINS WHAT HIS PLATFORM GAMES PICKED UP FROM SONIC'S ORIGINAL OUTING

Like many a young Sonic fan in the early Nineties, Jay's first exposure to Sonic came through Sega's slick advertising campaign. "There was this advertisement for *Sonic The Hedgehog* that had game footage of Sonic bouncing off crab Badniks in Spring Yard Zone, parallel-edited to footage of a ninja backflipping around a real-life city and it all looked so *cool*. I knew I needed to play it." That visual appeal carried over when they finally got to enjoy the game, too. "Immediately I was taken back by how *strange* everything was; the surreal pop-art visuals of Green Hill Zone especially. The way it looked and sounded, even stuff like what my ten-year-old self thought was the Pringles mascot on the end-of-level signposts, this game was a few shades weirder than the *Wonder Boys* and *Alex Kidds* I'd been used to before then."

For Jay, the original game remains the best of the bunch. "It's still a really good platform game at heart; one in which the character *can* run fast, as opposed to the quick change into a *speed-focused* platformer soon thereafter. *Sonic* wasn't afraid to take the pace down a few notches to do some good, honest, traditional platforming – where later games, though I still love those too, felt the need to litter most levels with roller-coaster sections, led into with a horizontal spring or other speed-boost gimmick."

That level-design philosophy has greatly influenced Jay's own platform games, too. "I've developed such a love for flow-state platforming, it's evident in my first Steam release, *Quickly, Quackley!* As a platform game in which each level is set to a strict 13-second time limit, designing level layouts that feel *great* to get a good flowing route was high priority. Moving forward, this approach is also seen to a less-overt degree in my upcoming hand-drawn *NekoNecro*. Cheekily, there's even a nod to that crab Badnik bounce from the old *Sonic* TV advert in there somewhere!"



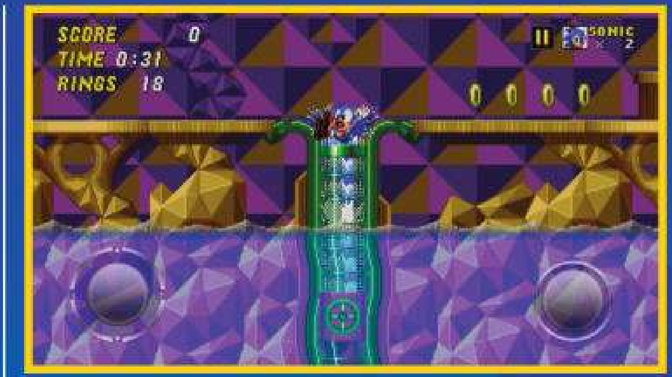
» [PC] Distinctive art attracted Jay to *Sonic*, and is a key feature of their forthcoming *NekoNecro*.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

AS ARGUABLY THE MOST POPULAR OF THE MEGA DRIVE SONIC GAMES, SONIC 2 DOESN'T NEED TOO MUCH TWEAKING, BUT THIS REMASTERED VERSION INCLUDES THE ONLY OFFICIAL VERSION OF AN INFAMOUS LOST LEVEL

As great as the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* was, it's the sequel and its enormous hype campaign that arguably did the most to shape the perception of the series amongst the wider public. "*Sonic 2* had many qualities that made it stand out among the Mega Drive originals," says Simon. "Firstly, it was the longest of the individual games by zone count. It was the first to introduce a partner character (Tails!), the first to introduce Super Sonic, and the first to contain both co-operative and competition modes. Specifically, regarding the competition mode, this was arguably the best in the series. Other factors include *Sonic 2*'s stint as a pack-in game with the model 2 Mega Drive, and the enormous mystery surrounding it and its lost zones."

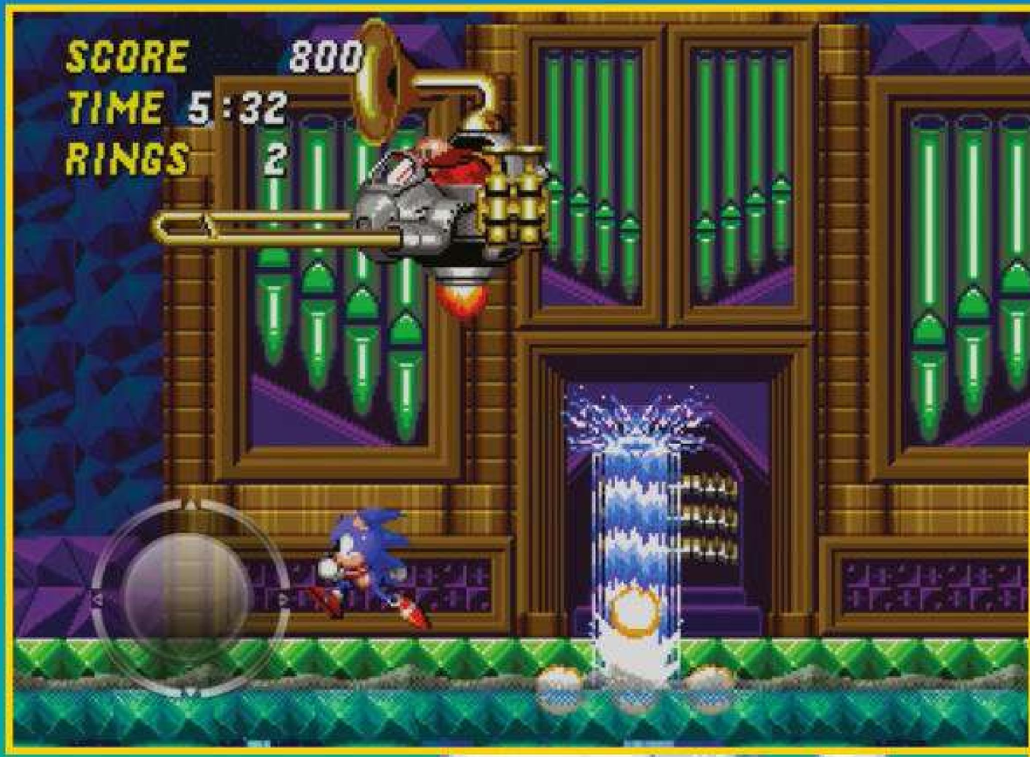
The topic of lost zones highlights a funny thing about *Sonic 2*. The Mega Drive game may feel like a more 'complete' *Sonic* experience because it already has the Spin Dash and Tails, and you can get Knuckles into it via *Sonic & Knuckles*. As a result, the kind of additions that had defined the *Sonic CD* and *Sonic 1* remasters weren't possible. But the original game had a messy development process which resulted in plenty of unused elements, most notoriously the Hidden Palace Zone. "There were several concepts that didn't make the cut, but Hidden Palace was the subject of schoolyard rumours and later discourse on the internet," recalls Simon. "Entire websites were dedicated to information gleaned from magazine prints, theories and researching the game itself. I don't think I've ever seen such intense interest in the development of any one other game!"



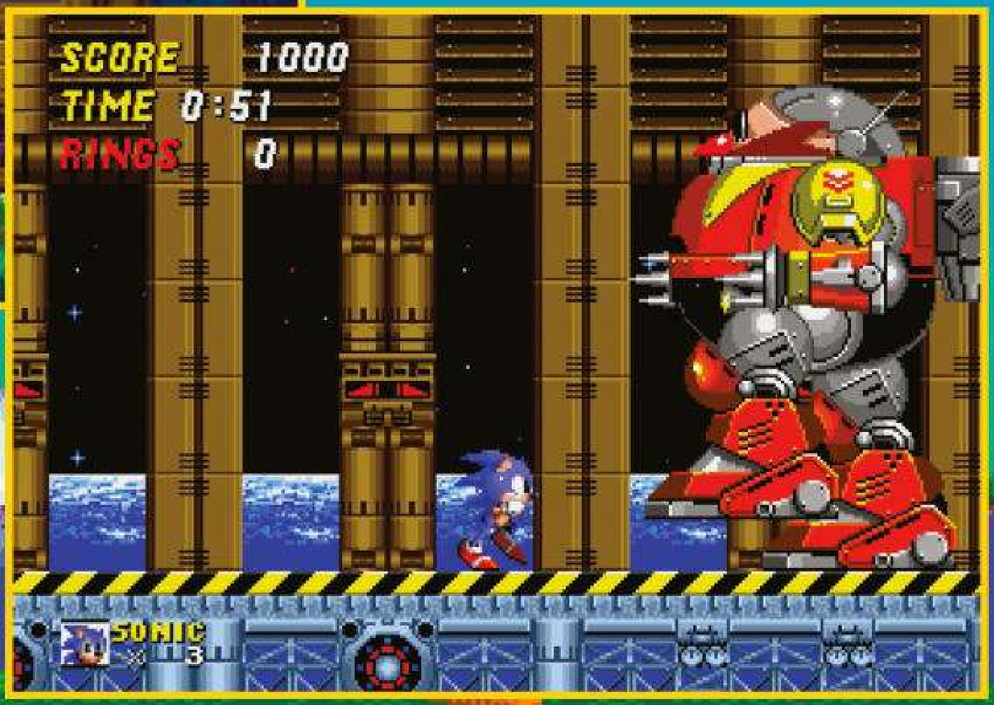
» [Android] Though most of the graphics here existed in the prototype, the water spout gimmick was newly implemented.

Hidden Palace Zone was hardly the only cut stage to draw fan interest – others include a desert stage mocked up for a magazine advert, the unfortunately named Genocide City Zone and Wood Zone, a barely playable level found in prototypes of the game. What made Hidden Palace Zone different was that remnants of it had scraped into the final game, albeit only as a title card and a garbled mess of deleted assets that could be accessed via cheat devices. But the prototype versions of *Sonic 2* that have surfaced over the years revealed it to be the most developed of the unused stages.

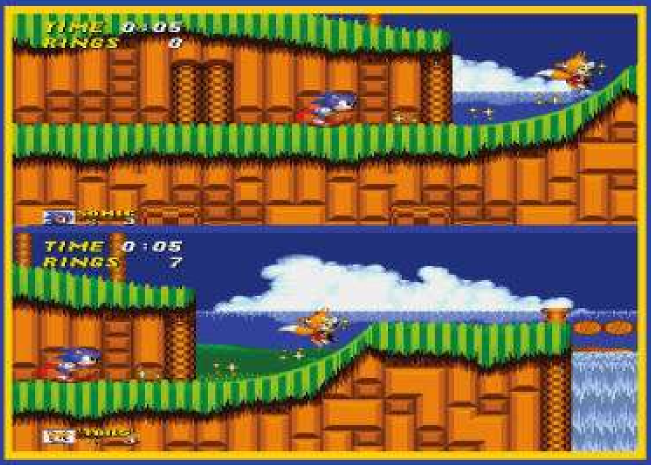
The available assets, combined with plenty of evidence of interest in the stage, allowed the team to successfully pitch the concept of completing Hidden Palace Zone as a bonus stage for the mobile remaster. How did that come about? "The success of *Sonic CD* and the overwhelmingly



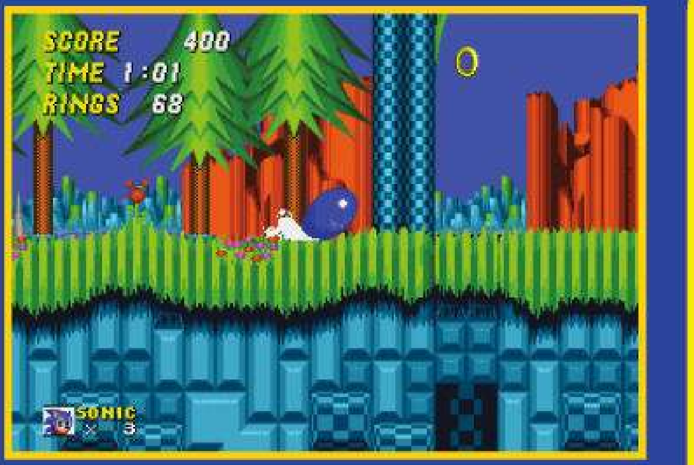
» [Android] Here's the Hidden Palace Zone boss, a brand-new creation for the remastered *Sonic 2*



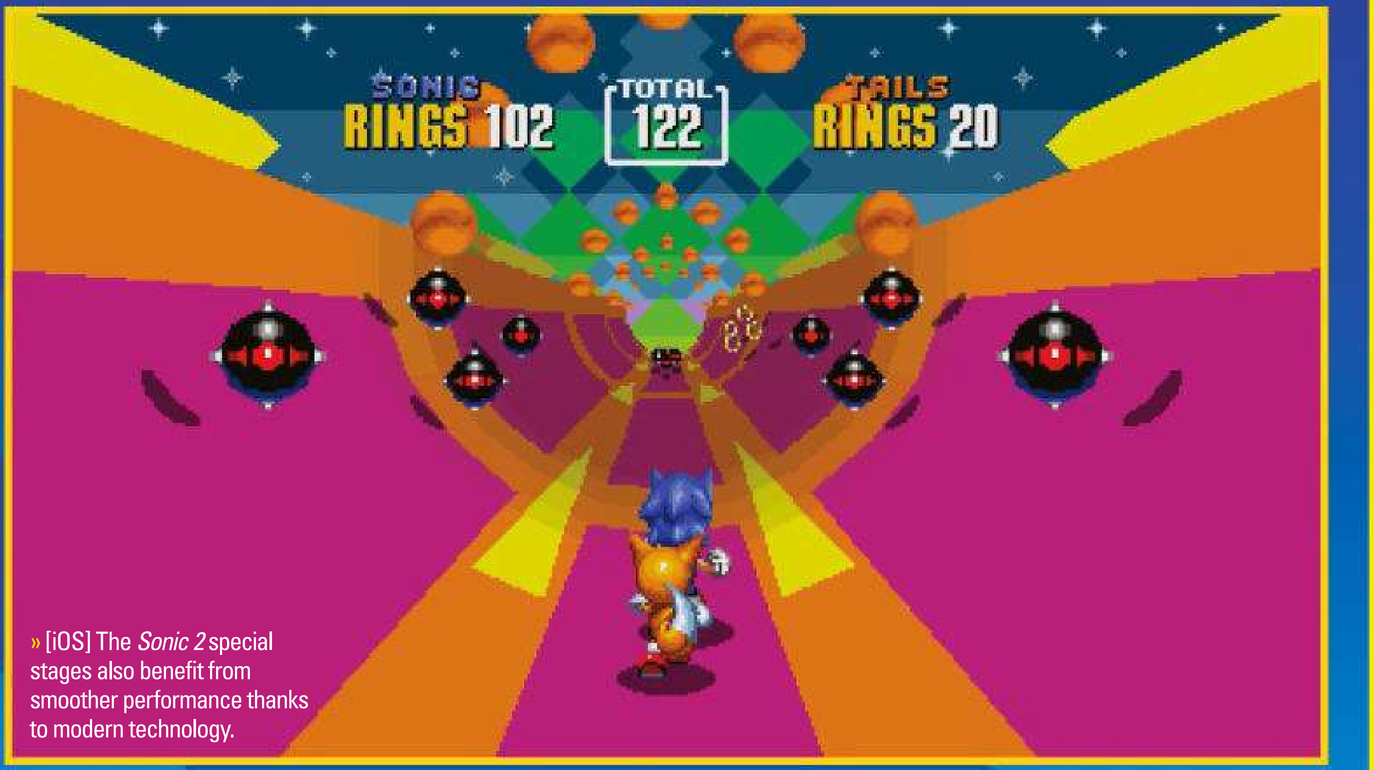
» [Mega Drive] Much of *Sonic 2*'s iconography is still in use today, like the Death Egg Robot here.



» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 2*'s competition mode isn't just about going fast – it's about grabbing rings and items too.



» [Mega Drive] The Spin Dash is a crucial addition to the series, and it made its debut in *Sonic 2*.



» [iOS] The *Sonic 2* special stages also benefit from smoother performance thanks to modern technology.

positive reception of *Sonic 1*'s bonus features certainly helped! Basically, we explained the fan fascination with Hidden Palace Zone and how a completed version would make for a very popular bonus feature for *Sonic 2*," Simon explains. "Iizuka-san agreed to let us try building it into something complete, and what we ended up with seemed to address the 'flow' concerns raised during *Sonic 2*'s original development."

Plenty of graphical assets were available for the stage from the prototypes. However, the level layout was never fully completed and the enemies within were fairly simplistic, and there was no evidence of a boss encounter for the stage. As a result, the team still had much to do to turn it into a finished level. "Aside from the layout and the boss, the Jellygnite enemy and basically all the gimmicks are also brand-new," Simon tells us. "There were only a small number of tiles added to create loops, and the Redz enemy was given the ability to breathe fire." Whether you're an old hand or a newcomer, the addition of a completed Hidden Palace Zone ensures that the remastered *Sonic 2* must be played.

Having already had its level design tweaked for more mobile characters once via *Sonic & Knuckles*, the remaster simply didn't need as many adjustments. "*Sonic 2* provided fewer opportunities for non-invasive additions, but there are a few," Simon teases. "See if you can find them!" Other nice additions included a Time Attack mode that allows you to record your fastest times and a Boss Attack mode which lined you up against all of Robotnik's deadliest machines. They might seem minor, but the team already added an extra stage to one of the greatest platform games of all time – what more could you ask for? ▶

REDHOTSONIC

RED HOT SEQUEL

YOUTUBER REDHOTSONIC EXPLAINS WHY SONIC'S SECOND OUTING IS HIS FAVOURITE

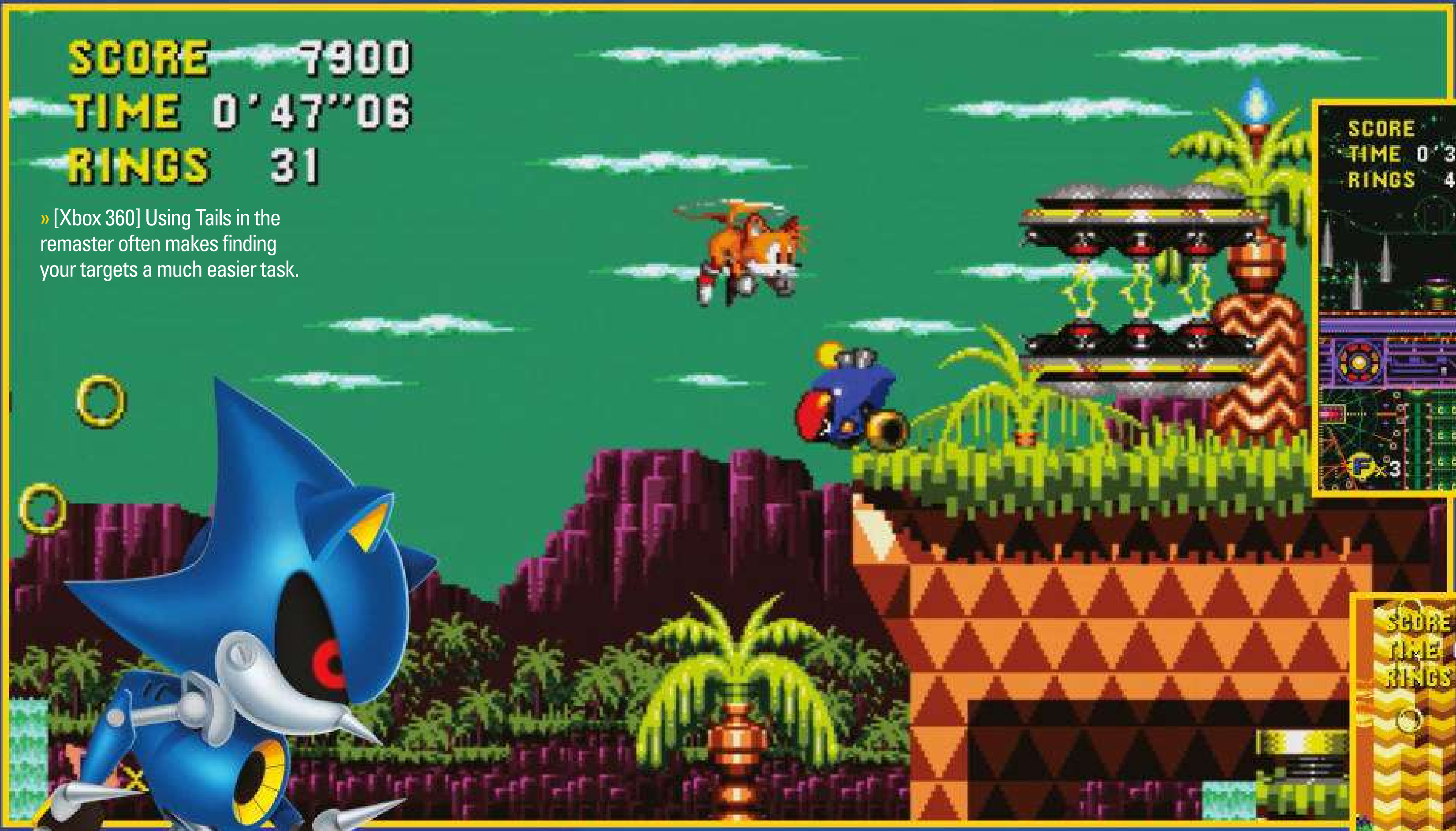
Long before he started making videos about Sonic on YouTube (www.youtube.com/c/redhotsonic), it was a shopping bag in the possession of a stranger that caught the attention of a young redhotsonic. "I was so mesmerised, the bloke there was so kind that he actually swapped this Sonic bag for another bag that my mum had," he recalls. "I got *Sonic 2* for Christmas 1992 and I played the heck out of it. I think I preferred it over *Sonic 1* because I found it easier. That's probably why it's my favourite out of the classics, I just played it the most."

Sonic's new Spin Dash move was a key part of the fun factor. "I don't think anyone can live without it now, it's a fundamental part of Sonic," he says. "It brings to the table what Sega were promising – *Sonic* is all about speed and blast processing. I think that was one of the best things they've ever added to the *Sonic* series." By comparison, redhotsonic feels that without player-controlled flight, Tails wasn't quite as crucial. "He helps along with the story, especially when it gets to like the Wing Fortress and Sky Chase, Death Egg and the cutscenes. But otherwise he's just a pain in the bottom, especially in special stages, that I think we can all agree on," he says, before reconsidering. "He did bring two-player to the table, so maybe that's not fair."

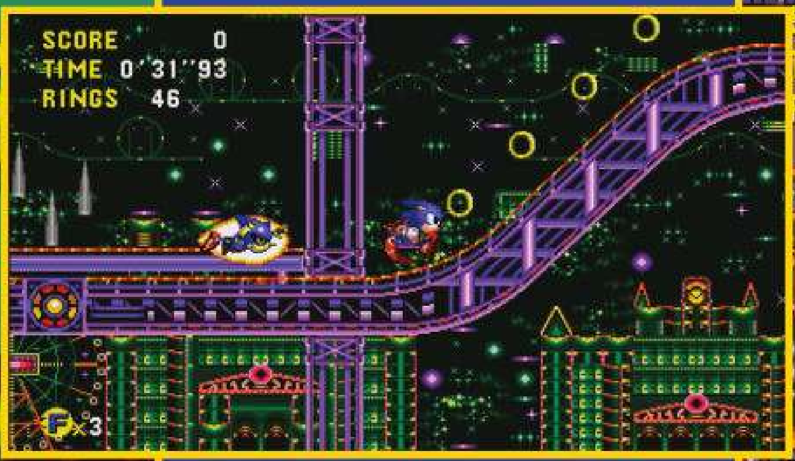
However, the best memory was the surprise that awaited when all seven Chaos Emeralds were collected during a gaming session with his mum. "We both slowly turned our heads looking at each other, our jaws had dropped, like, 'Super Sonic!'" he recalls. "We couldn't actually figure out how to become Super Sonic until I actually turned into him, I think in Wing Fortress. So I only got to use him once for the very first time!"

Sonic the Hedgehog
C64 Breadbin NTSC
Sonic the Hedgehog
SEGA Master System NTSC

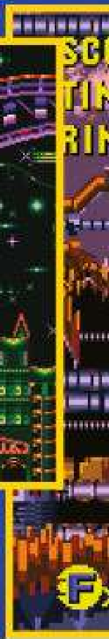
» Redhotsonic is known for detailed explanations and comparisons of how fan projects run on real hardware.

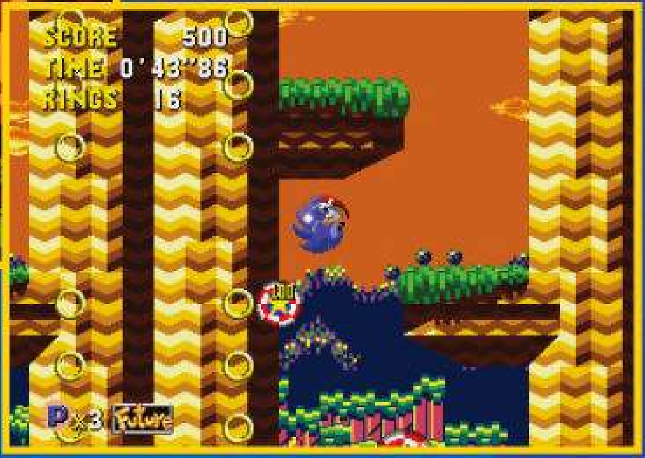


» [Xbox 360] Using Tails in the remaster often makes finding your targets a much easier task.



» [Xbox 360] The 16:9 display makes the race against Metal Sonic less of a memory test.





» [Mega-CD] Newcomers to *Sonic CD* are often bewildered by seeing rings embedded in walls.

SONIC CD

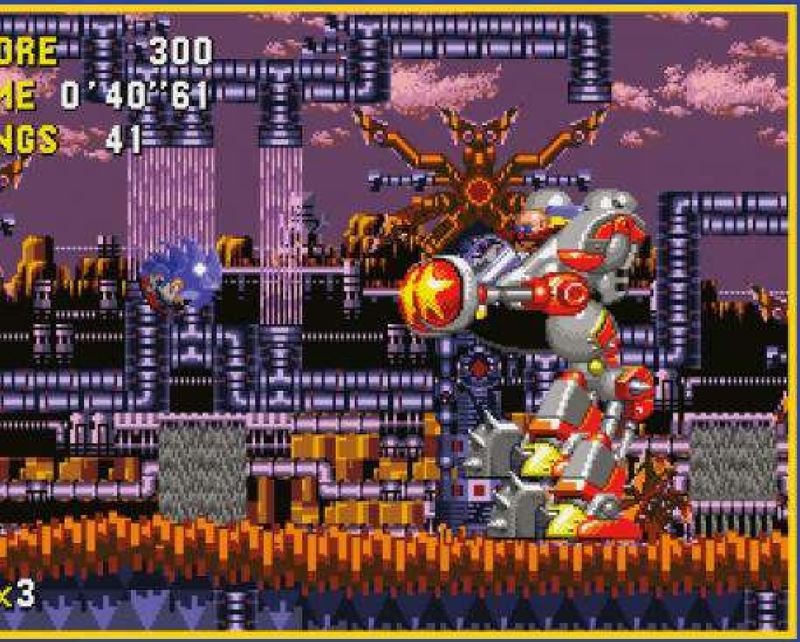
SONIC ORIGINS AND SONIC MANIA WOULDN'T EXIST WITHOUT THIS MEGA-CD ODDITY, A FORMERLY HARD-TO-ACQUIRE GAME WHICH INSPIRED CHRISTIAN WHITEHEAD TO DEVELOP THE RETRO ENGINE

Though it arrived ten months after the release of *Sonic 2*, Sonic's only Mega-CD outing felt much more like a parallel evolution of the original game than it did a second sequel. Shared ideas such as pinball-themed stages and a robotic Sonic were explored in totally different ways, the Spin Dash worked differently, and Tails was nowhere to be found. But by far the biggest difference was in the structure of the game, as *Sonic CD*'s best ending requires players to find a way back to the past in each stage, in order to find and destroy Robotnik's machinery to create a good future. Where *Sonic 2*'s stages often felt like obstacle courses that encouraged the player to get to the goal as quickly as possible, *Sonic CD*'s stages invited more exploration and backtracking.

"I think the time-travel aspect of *Sonic CD* was a great way to introduce an element of exploration," says Simon. "There might be a few who call it optional, but personally I won't settle for less than the 'perfect' ending of collecting all the Time Stones and destroying every robot generator and Metal Sonic hologram. It certainly increases the difficulty, though! I'm not sure there are many other ways to make such a thing feel rewarding for Sonic but hunting down the Chaos Emeralds in *Sonic 1* and *2* for Game Gear/Master System was a nice compromise for lack of special stages. I'd say, though, that tracking down Star Posts and Special Rings in *Sonic 2* and *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* for Mega Drive, respectively, do lend to some light exploration. There's even a 'Perfect Bonus' for collecting all rings within a level in *Sonic 2*, although it's physically impossible on some. But, no, none of them are on the level of *Sonic CD*."

Sonic CD was the first of the Retro Engine *Sonic* games. In an interview with TouchArcade, Christian Whitehead stated that development began in March 2008, and that the iPhone version of the engine took just a week to set up. A pitch was made in the summer of 2009, ultimately leading to the project being picked up. "I didn't have direct, official involvement with *Sonic CD*, but I did do a lot of reverse-engineering and documentation work that allowed Christian to make the faithful recreation of Palmtree Panic and the Special Stage that won the project a green light," Simon explains. "I provided similar support at times throughout development, but I was never given access to the RSDK version of the game." The project eventually saw release in 2011, arriving on Android and iOS as well as the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC.

As much as it was designed to be an excellent game, *Sonic CD* was also intended to show off what CD-ROM technology could bring to the series. CD audio was used to deliver an excellent soundtrack, and the remaster offered you the choice between Naofumi Hataya and Masafumi Ogata's original Japanese tunes or the American soundtrack by Spencer Nilsen and David Young. FMV intro and ending sequences were used for the first time, and appear at a far higher quality than they did on the Mega-CD. The special



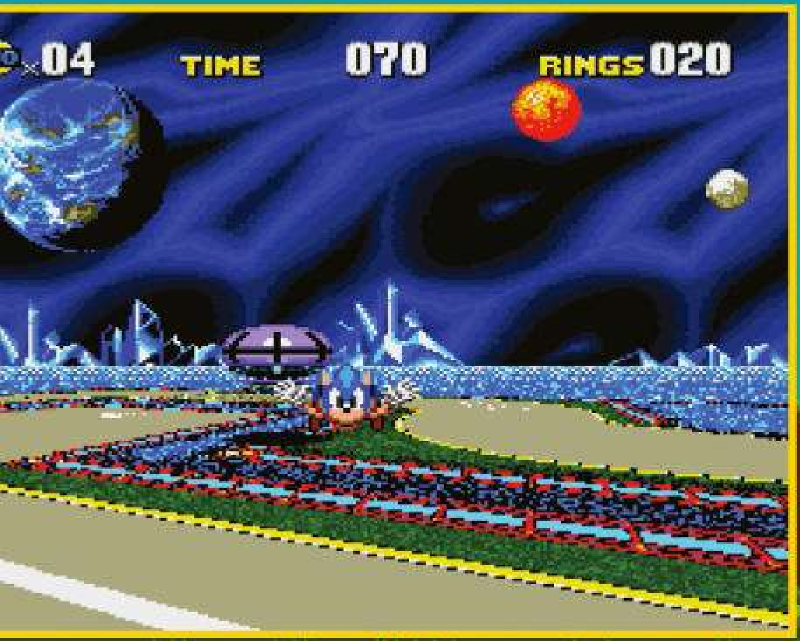
» [Mega-CD] The original Japanese soundtrack features some classic rave tracks for the bad-future stages.

stages, in which Sonic had to run around a 3D environment destroying UFOs, used the rotation and scaling capabilities of the new hardware to great effect. Technology moves on though, and *Sonic Origins* makes the Special Stage experience that much nicer with a major performance boost.

“Although I wasn’t terribly bothered by the choppiness of the Mega-CD original, the higher framerate in the remake is a definite improvement. Technical limitations of the Mega Drive prevented the 3D effect from updating any more frequently than 20fps, but modern players will expect more out of their current hardware,” says Simon. “Updating the Special Stage to run at the same 60fps as the rest of the game seems only natural and will help avoid a feeling of dissonance for anyone used to higher performance when switching between gameplay modes. Veteran players will certainly notice the difference too.”

Sonic CD is one of the less frequently reissued Sonic games, so its inclusion in *Sonic Origins* with features like the modern Spin Dash and Tails is most welcome. It can be a bit divisive, but for the first time in a long time, console owners will have the opportunity to make their own minds up. ▶

» [Mega-CD] It’s a bit easier to smash UFOs in the remaster due to a higher framerate and smoother scaling.



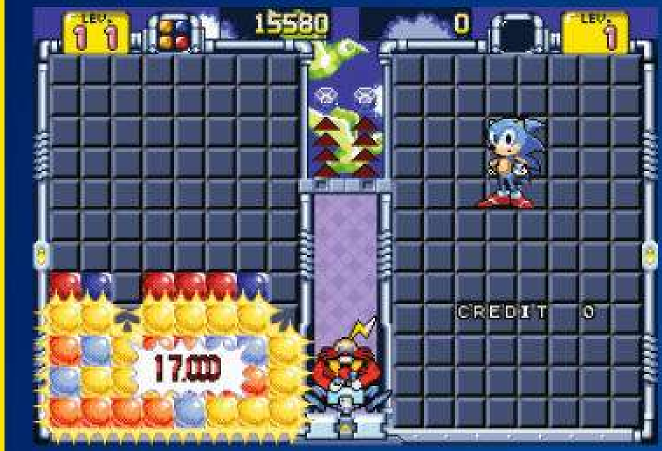
BURIED TREASURES

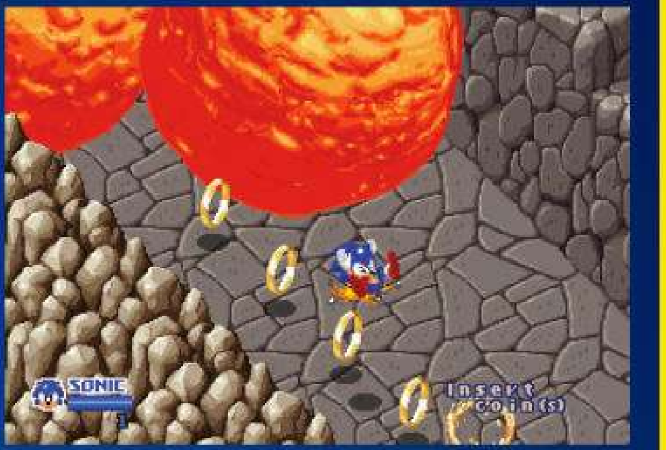
FANS ONCE CLAMOURED FOR A PORT OF SONIC CD. WHICH GAMES DO THEY WANT NEXT?

SEGASONIC BROS

ARCADE, 1992

■ It’s not the best puzzle game ever, which is why it never received a full release after being location tested, but *SegaSonic Bros* is an interesting piece of history. Sonic fans would definitely value an official release as a result.





SEGASONIC THE HEDGEHOG

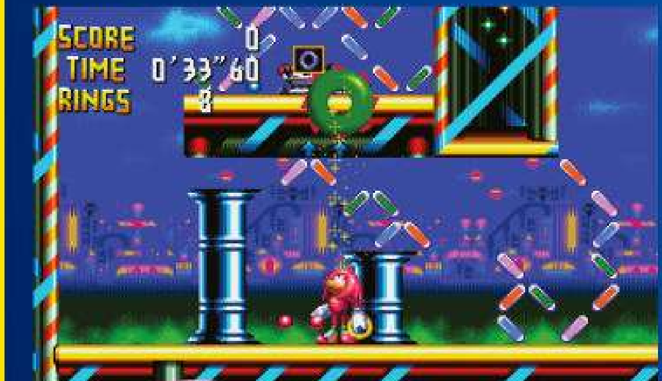
ARCADE, 1993

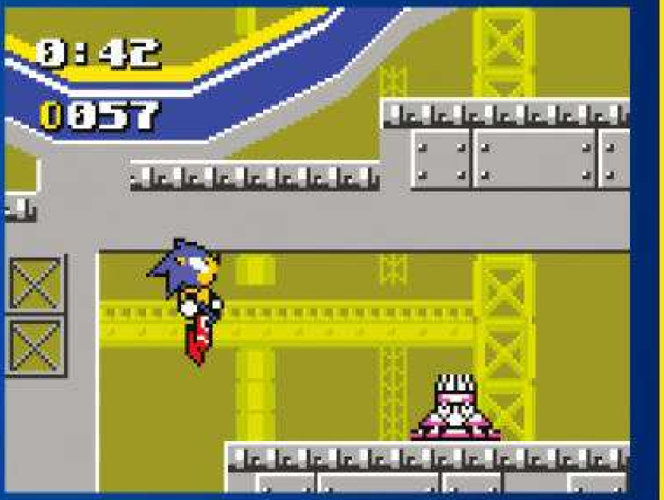
■ This isometric arcade game is more about running away from things than platforming, but it’s a real rarity and fans are desperate to see a home port. Adjusting the trackball control scheme for a pad is probably the sticking point.

KNUCKLES’ CHAOTIX

32X, 1995

■ The only solo adventure starring Sonic’s feisty rival is an experimental platformer in which two characters are tethered together in elastic fashion. It’s never been ported before, and would be welcomed as it has become pricey on the secondary market.

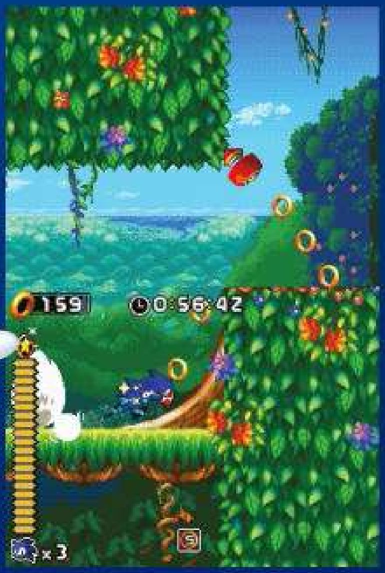




SONIC POCKET ADVENTURE

NEO GEO POCKET COLOR, 1999

■ Although it’s mostly a remix of the Mega Drive games, the many hidden puzzle pieces are a very compelling reason to thoroughly explore every well-designed stage. We’re hoping SNK adds it to the Neo Geo Pocket Color Selection range.



SONIC RUSH

DS, 2005

■ With the 3DS having been discontinued in 2020, *Sonic Rush* has become arguably the best *Sonic* game that isn’t playable on any currently available platform. Compensating for the lack of the console’s unique features would be tough, but definitely worthwhile.

SONIC 3 & KNUCKLES

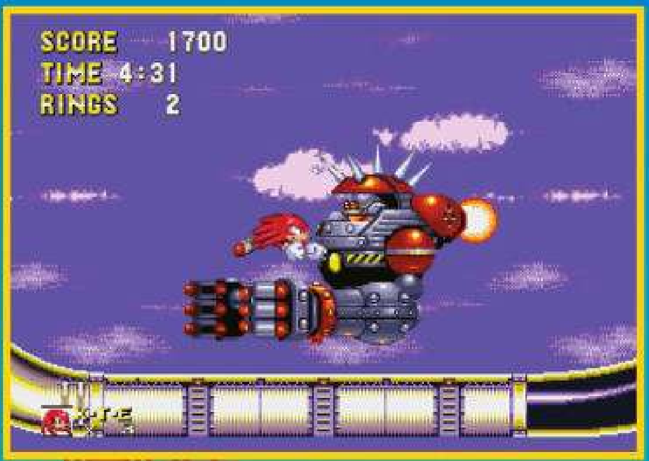
A FAN FAVOURITE THAT HAS BEEN ABSENT FOR OVER A DECADE, SONIC 3 & KNUCKLES IS FINALLY GETTING THE RETRO ENGINE REMASTER TREATMENT IN SONIC ORIGINS. HOW DID THE MUCH-REQUESTED PROJECT FINALLY GET THE GO AHEAD?

When you go back and read contemporary coverage of *Sonic 3*, it's plain to see that a certain sense of fatigue had started to accompany the rapid growth of the *Sonic* series. *Mean Machines Sega* said it would be "a tricky game for Sega to pull off". *Sega Power* was "sceptical", fearing a "tired reworking" of the formula, while *CVG*'s Deniz Ahmet admitted that he was "all set to be highly critical of *Sonic 3* after hearing that it was more of the same". All three magazines ultimately awarded the game scores of 90% or more. *Sega Pro* even alleged that *Sonic 3* was "a game Sega admits is not supposed to be the mass-market success *Sonic 2* was", but awarded the game 87% in spite of its hefty £59.99 price tag.

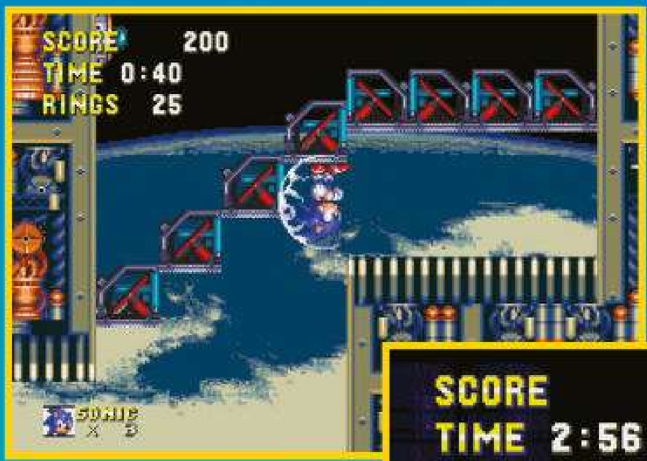
That goes a long way to encapsulating the odd position *Sonic 3* is in. Critics responded well because the game did meaningfully improve on its predecessors, with longer and more elaborate stages, a greater number of boss fights with more interesting designs, and two new bonus stages. But while it was a sales hit, it wasn't a success on the scale of either of the first two games. There are a few ways to explain that – you could talk about the high price, the fact that it wasn't as commonly bundled with hardware as the previous games, or even point to that sense of fatigue with the series. In any case, the result is that while *Sonic 2* is the iconic game, *Sonic 3* is the game that the hardcore fans are more likely to point to as the best of the bunch. Or more accurately, it's half of that game.

Mean Machines Sega's review of *Sonic 3* mentioned the existence of "a deluxe 24-meg edition of the game, with extra levels and enhanced play". That never quite came to pass, but the magazine also hinted at the potential for "an upgrade for the 16-meg edition", which likely sounds much more familiar to you as it describes *Sonic & Knuckles*. "*Sonic 3* was famously split into two parts that could be physically connected to create the complete game, with the same 'lock-on technology' having the ability to bring Knuckles into *Sonic 2* and providing a nigh infinite number of Blue Spheres minigame stages as well as spawning the '& Knuckles' meme that was embraced by even Sega themselves," says Simon. So where *Sonic 3* was more than just more of the same, *Sonic & Knuckles* was precisely more of the same because it was the second half of the game as planned.

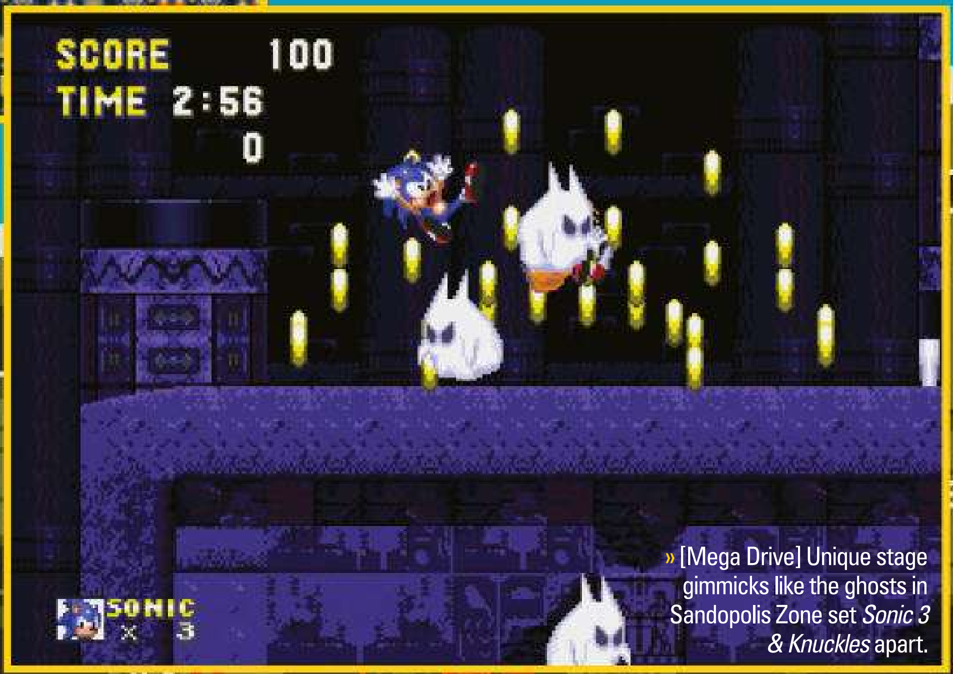
In some ways, the split actually enhanced the experience at the time, as ensuring that Knuckles wasn't a playable character from the start arguably fed into the hype for *Sonic & Knuckles*. It was fun to play with his unique abilities to glide, climb walls and smash through otherwise unbreakable obstacles, but it felt like Sega had been extremely clever when you took him back into *Sonic 3* and discovered that unique routes had been planned for him right from the start. However, it's the combined experience you'll be getting in *Sonic Origins*. "Sega feels that it's best to present only the full game as '*Sonic 3*



» [Mega Drive] Sonic fights this boss in *Sonic 3*, but it's exclusive to Knuckles in the combined game.

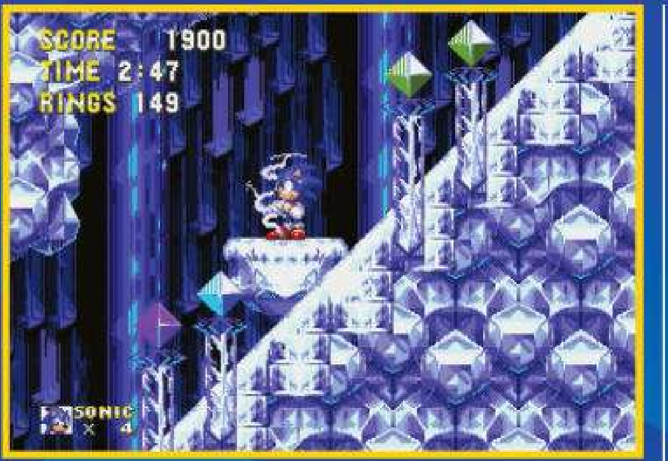


» [Mega Drive] Reversed gravity was one of the trickier features for the Headcannon team to implement.

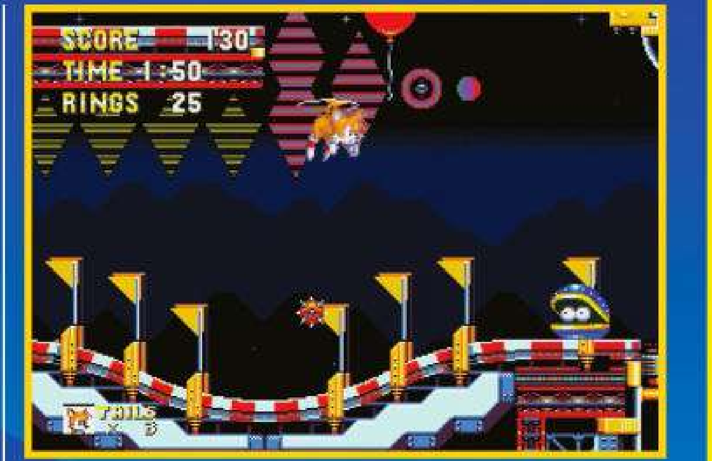


» [Mega Drive] Unique stage gimmicks like the ghosts in Sandopolis Zone set *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* apart.

» The *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* iOS proof of concept was only shown via YouTube.



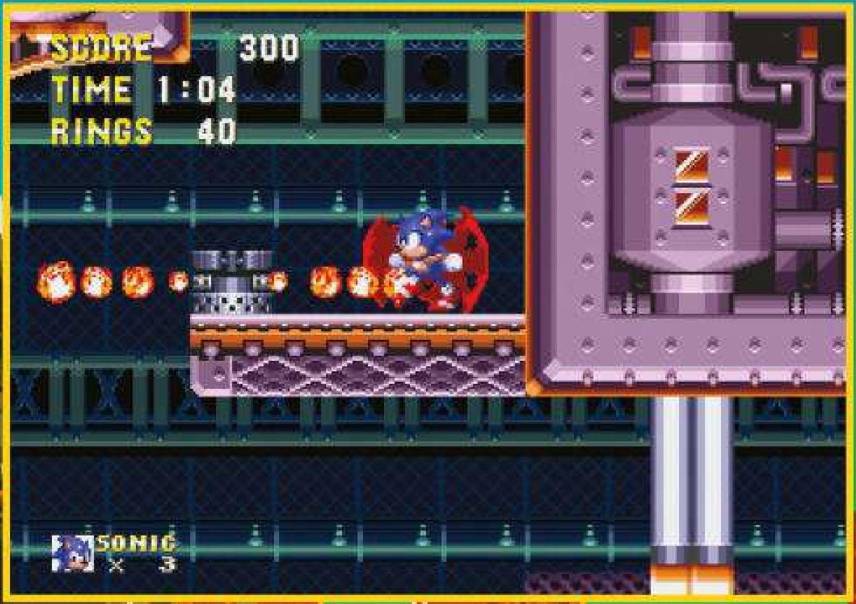
» [Mega Drive] Objects passing through vertically wrapping areas were also tricky for the team.



» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3* actually lets you control Tails in flight, unlike *Sonic 2*.

& Knuckles' in this collection because it best represents, as the title suggests, Sonic's origins," Simon explains. It's probably for the best, given that the surprise factor no longer exists.

The combined game is one Simon holds in high regard, as you might expect from a long-term fan. "Fittingly, as it's the newest, *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* is the pinnacle of 2D Mega Drive Sonic. The gameplay had been highly refined and the graphic and sound design were top notch. Tails could fly freely; Knuckles was introduced as Sonic's rival and a new playable character," he says. "This is all in addition to the massive well-made levels, menacing bosses (and minibosses), and many integrated story event scenes that made the whole thing feel like an epic adventure! For some, it's also because the full, combined game introduced the Super Emeralds and Hyper Sonic, which do, indeed, return in this version! There are so many things that make *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* super memorable, but the most important is that it's just *fun*!" ▶



» [Mega Drive] Elemental shields gave Sonic extra abilities, and all characters gain total invulnerability against matching hazards.

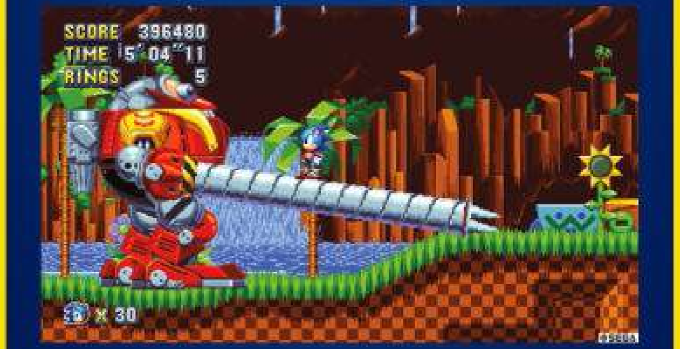
ENGINE ROOM

SIMON THOMLEY EXPLAINS THE EVOLUTION OF THE RETRO ENGINE

Although *Sonic Origins* has been built using the Retro Engine, the engine itself has existed since 2008 and evolved plenty in the years since then. "*Sonic CD* was built using Retro Engine v3, while *Sonic 1*, *2* and the original proof of concept for *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* were built in v4," reveals Simon. "The editing tools were more primitive, and game code was written using a proprietary scripting language that was interpreted at runtime." From there, the team moved on from remastering old games to making a new one. "When it came time to work on *Sonic Mania*, a new v5 Retro Engine was created that used a more C-like script that was compiled into platform-native code. This greatly simplified the workflow and allowed us to do much more fancy things than were possible with v4," says Simon.

"When we were asked to remake *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*, we had conversations with Sega that led to the conclusion that the best move for the collection would be to use Retro Engine once again for consistency. I discussed this with Christian [Whitehead] as well, which ultimately led to the creation of 'Retro Engine v5 Ultimate'. This is essentially the same v5 as was used for *Sonic Mania*, but the intermediate scripting was dropped in favour of coding directly in C++ and modules for running v3 and v4 games were added to support the previous remakes. Rather than use v4 and the earlier proof of concept, *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* was built natively using C++ in this 'v5U'."

One thing Simon is keen to ensure is that the proper people receive credit for their work. "Retro Engine is not mine or ours. It was created by Christian and belongs to Evening Star," he clarifies. "Headcannon does have our own engine named Methyl, but it wasn't used this time around. Incidentally though, there were some aspects of *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* that weren't possible with Retro Engine as it was, which ultimately led to me being allowed to incorporate my own 'Path Tracer' movement and collision system into the game."



» [PS4] *Sonic Mania* was built on the same engine as the remasters, albeit a newer version.

KNUCKLE UP

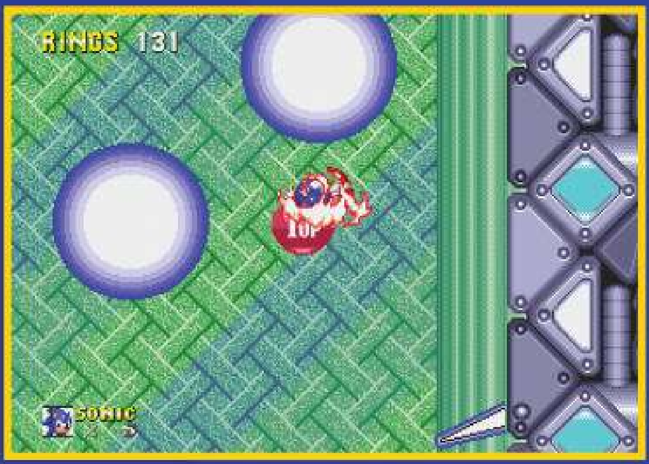
WHY FAITH JOHNSON FAVOURS THE FOURTH PART OF THE QUADRILOGY

You might well recognise Retro Faith, as she's known online, from her writing and videos or even her appearance in our own Collector's Corner section. Although she's a big fan of Sonic, Knuckles has been her favourite character ever since *Sonic 3*. "When I saw Knuckles, and I saw that red character with the dreadlocks and that music kicked in, something in me just went tick and I loved him," she recalls. "I loved the fact that he was a bad guy at first and he was a bit silly and was duped by Robotnik."

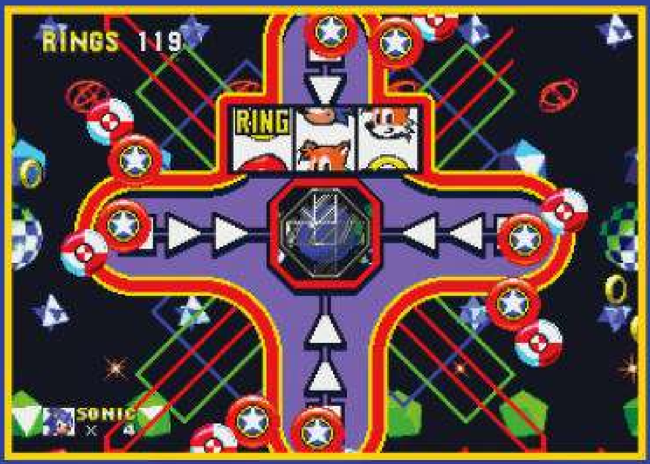
After becoming aware of the game through a *Sega Pro* preview, Faith got *Sonic & Knuckles* for Christmas 1994. "[It was] my most magical experience ever, I remember just playing it to death, completing it over and over again with Sonic and Knuckles, and just loving it." One memorable moment came when finishing the game with all of the Chaos Emeralds for the first time, and accessing the secret final stage. "I remember I just thought, 'Well that's the end of the game, I'll see the credits like I [always] have.' All of a sudden when it went 'dun-dun-duuun' I was like, 'What happened?!' I literally went, 'Oh my god,' and suddenly Super Sonic was flying and I didn't know what was happening."

When Faith later got to experience the game locked on with *Sonic 3*, the experience of playing older stages as Knuckles was a revelation. "All of a sudden, it dawns on you that Sega had been designing this whole thing from the start. And suddenly now it's like, 'Oh my god, I'm playing Act 2 of Angel Island, but I'm in a completely different zone.' What Sega did with that, and keeping it all under wraps a little bit as well for that whole year, was just incredible. I still think it's one of gaming's greatest achievements."

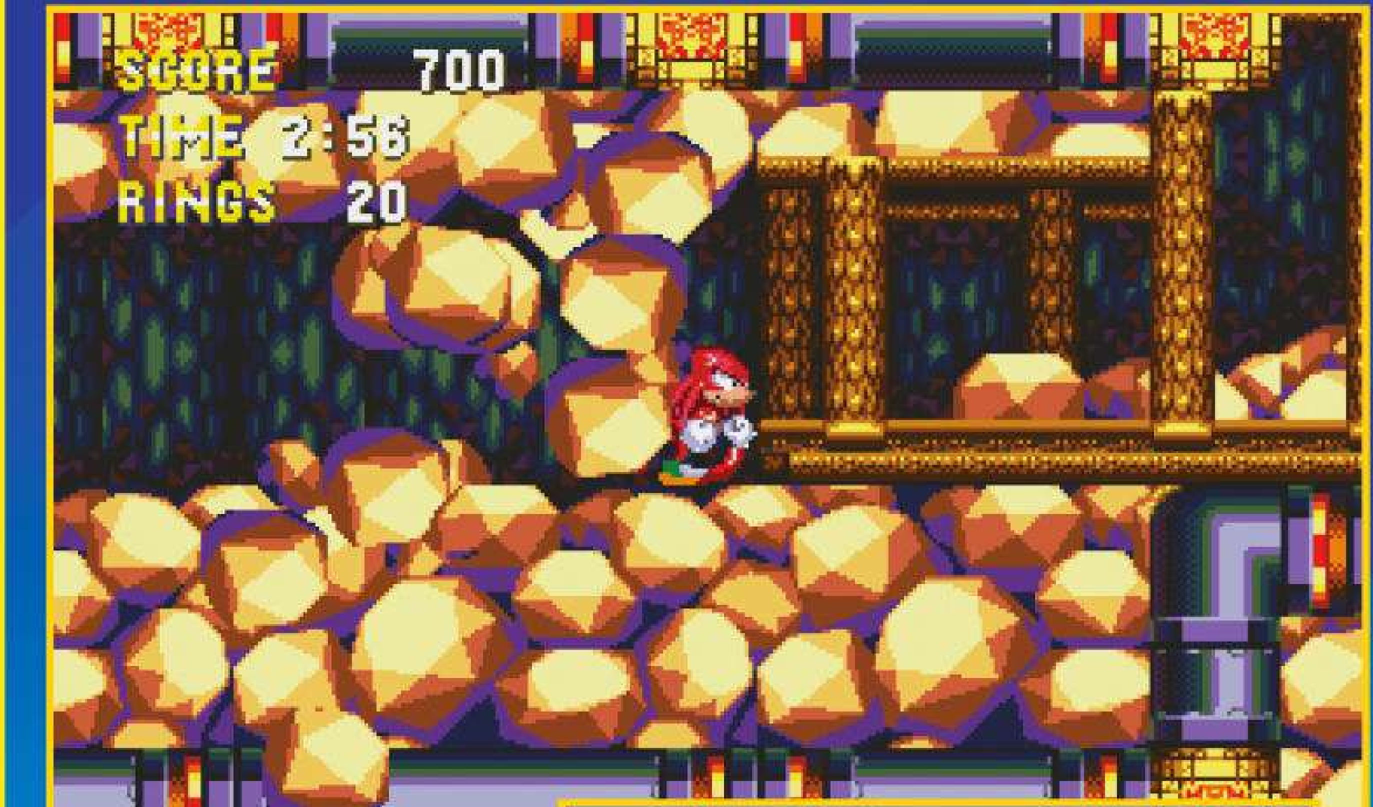
» Faith's love for *Sonic & Knuckles* is expressed in this customised Mega Drive and cartridge combo.



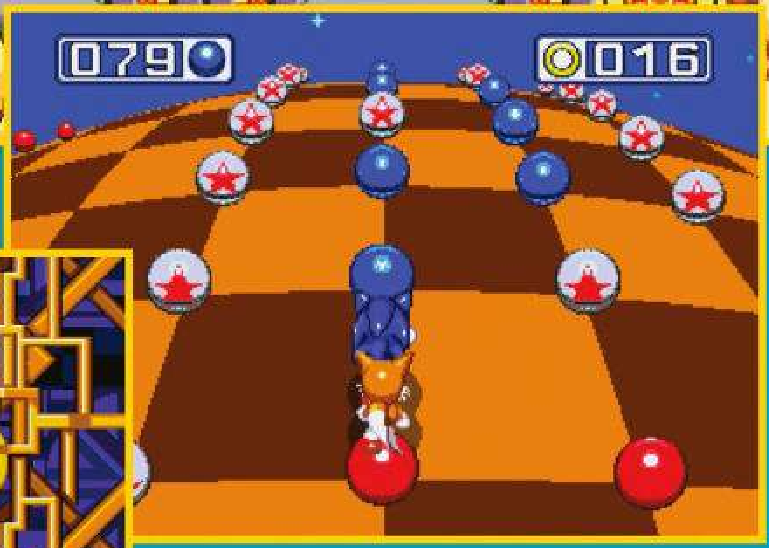
» [Mega Drive] This bonus stage in which Sonic orbits energy balls is hard to pick up.



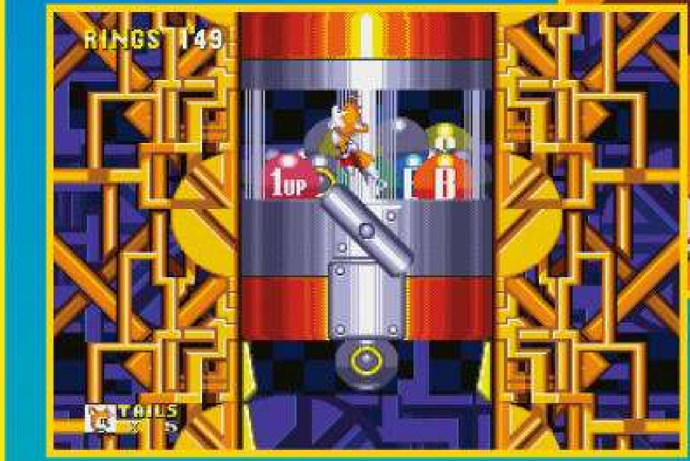
» [Mega Drive] The Special Stage from *Sonic 1* meets Casino Night Zone in this bonus stage.



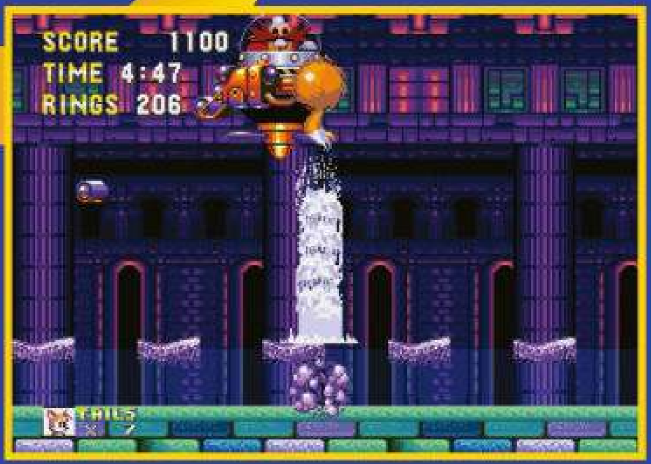
» [Mega Drive] Crashing through walls with Knuckles to reach new areas is very satisfying.



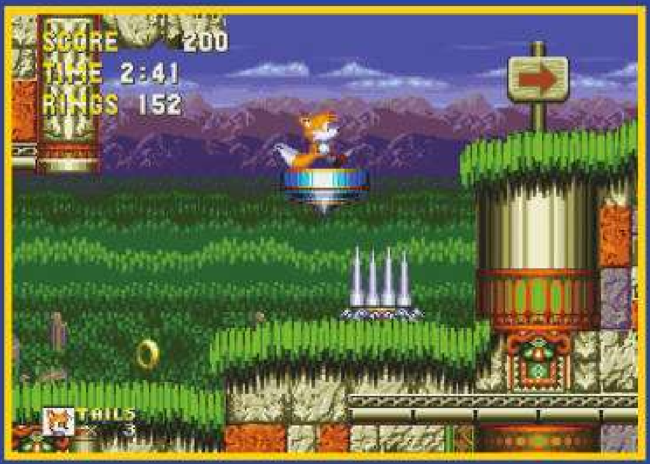
» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* introduced the popular Blue Spheres special stage for collecting Chaos Emeralds.



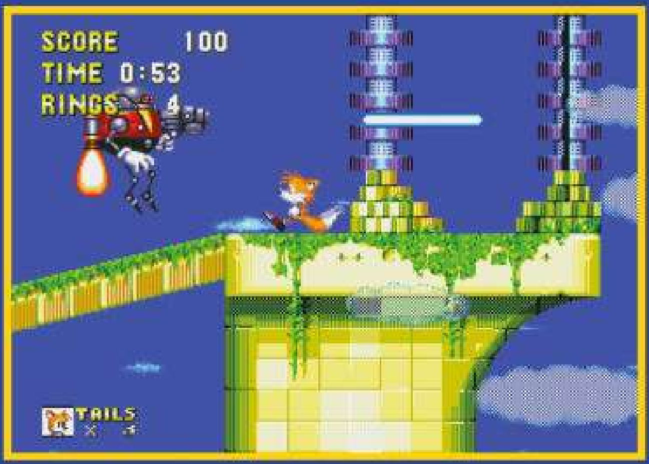
» [Mega Drive] The capsule machine dispenses extra lives, rings and shields at random when the handle turns.



» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3*'s boss fights were more imaginative and elaborate than those of prior games.



» [Mega Drive] This particular object seems to have caused Simon a bit of a headache.



» [Mega Drive] Tails isn't in *Sonic & Knuckles*, so can only access its stages in the combined game.

This was a game that both Simon and Christian Whitehead had wanted to remaster for mobile platforms in the same way as the other 16-bit games, and back in 2014 they spent months creating a proof of concept version of the game. This version featured Angel Island Zone and all four bonus stages, and a video was shown in October of that year to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*, despite the fact that Sega was not yet on board. Additional features mentioned at the time included full single-player versions of the competition stages, Time Attack and Boss Attack modes, as well as selectable game modes replicating the individual and combined games. An enhanced version of the Blue Spheres game was also on the cards, featuring green spheres requiring two passes to clear and pink teleportation spheres.

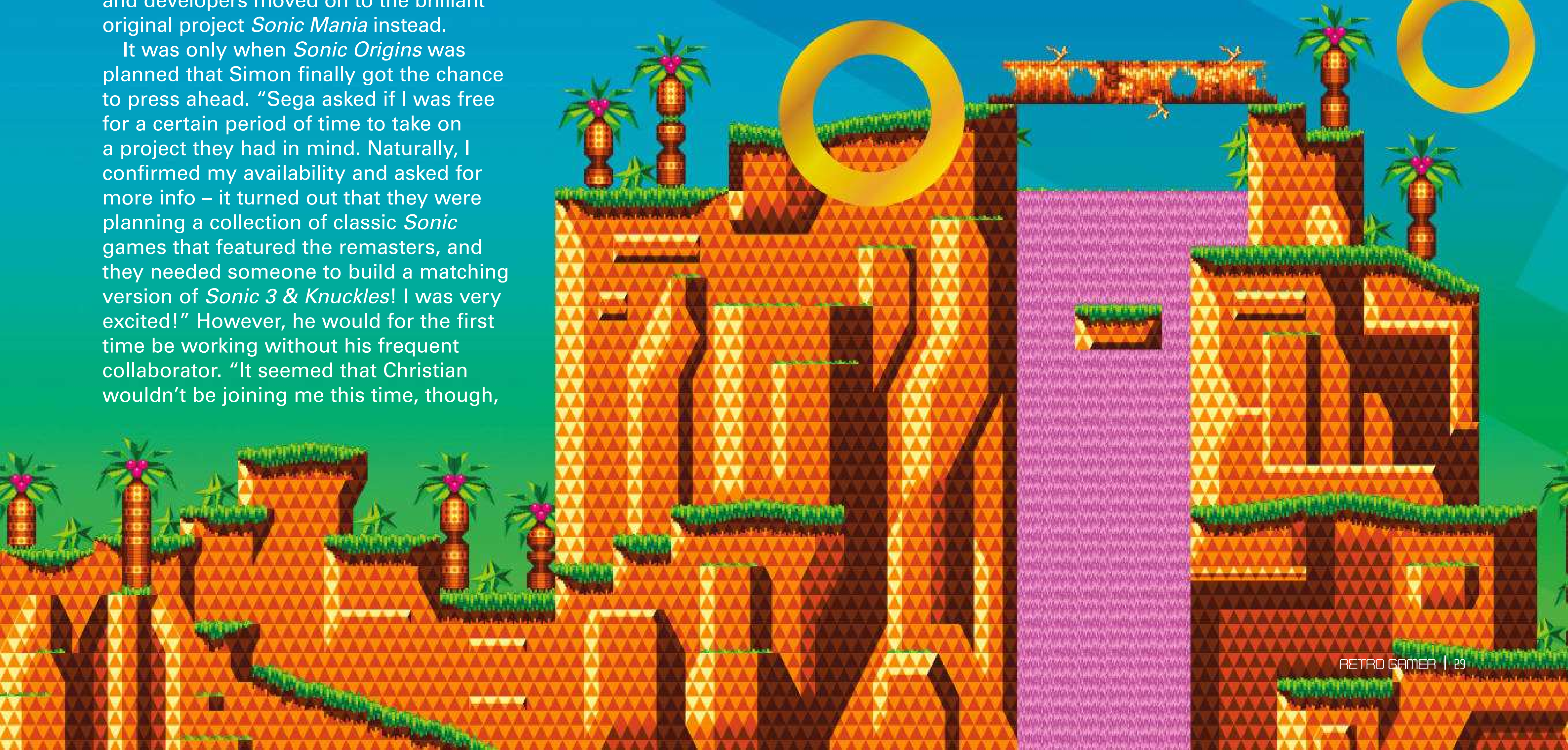
For reasons that were never made clear, Sega chose not to pursue the project at that time. A social-media campaign failed to convince the publisher to move forward, and for a time it looked as though *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* would never be remastered as the publisher and developers moved on to the brilliant original project *Sonic Mania* instead.

It was only when *Sonic Origins* was planned that Simon finally got the chance to press ahead. "Sega asked if I was free for a certain period of time to take on a project they had in mind. Naturally, I confirmed my availability and asked for more info – it turned out that they were planning a collection of classic *Sonic* games that featured the remasters, and they needed someone to build a matching version of *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*! I was very excited!" However, he would for the first time be working without his frequent collaborator. "It seemed that Christian wouldn't be joining me this time, though, so this would mean doing it without him. Fortunately, I had already been working with some other very talented people, and Sega was gracious enough to accept them as my team," he elaborates.

As a game so big that it needed to be split in two, it's no surprise that additional help was needed. "*Sonic 3 & Knuckles* is humongous, and with Christian out of the question, there's no way I could have rebuilt the entire thing from the ground up by myself in the given amount of time," says Simon. "This made it an easy decision to give four other people – Noah Hall, Derrek Harbold, Andy Collins and Elizabeth Ramirez – a chance at such high-profile work. In order, they were my two additional programmers, lead artist and tester, and what I feel I'd describe as 'asset wrangler'. My faith in them turned out to be well-placed, and I'm immensely proud of what we were able to accomplish together."

Having finally got the chance to complete the remaster he's wanted to do for the best part of a decade, we had to wonder how Simon felt it stacked up compared to the others. "I can't really speak for *CD*, but *1* and *2* were straightforward," he says. "*Sonic 3 & Knuckles* is by far the most complex of the group, though, so there were plenty of parts that proved challenging to integrate into Retro Engine, specifically! Moving floors and reverse gravity are a couple that spring to mind, as well as many objects that needed to interact with Y-axis wrapping. The ridable spinning top object in Marble Garden Zone…"

One thing that both Simon and Sega are keeping closely guarded are the kind of enhancements that the new version of *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* has received, but after reading this you may be able to guess some of them. "There were a lot of planned enhancements at the time a *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* remake was first pitched, and I'm happy to say that many of them have made it into *Origins* along with a few fresh ideas from the new team," Simon reveals. "Sonic's Drop Dash ability is a given, and the rest – well, see how many you can identify!" We're keen to do just that, but ultimately the enhancements are a nice bonus – with the opportunity to revisit Sonic's biggest 2D adventure having been so rare in recent times, we're just pleased to see it being made available to a whole new audience. ✱



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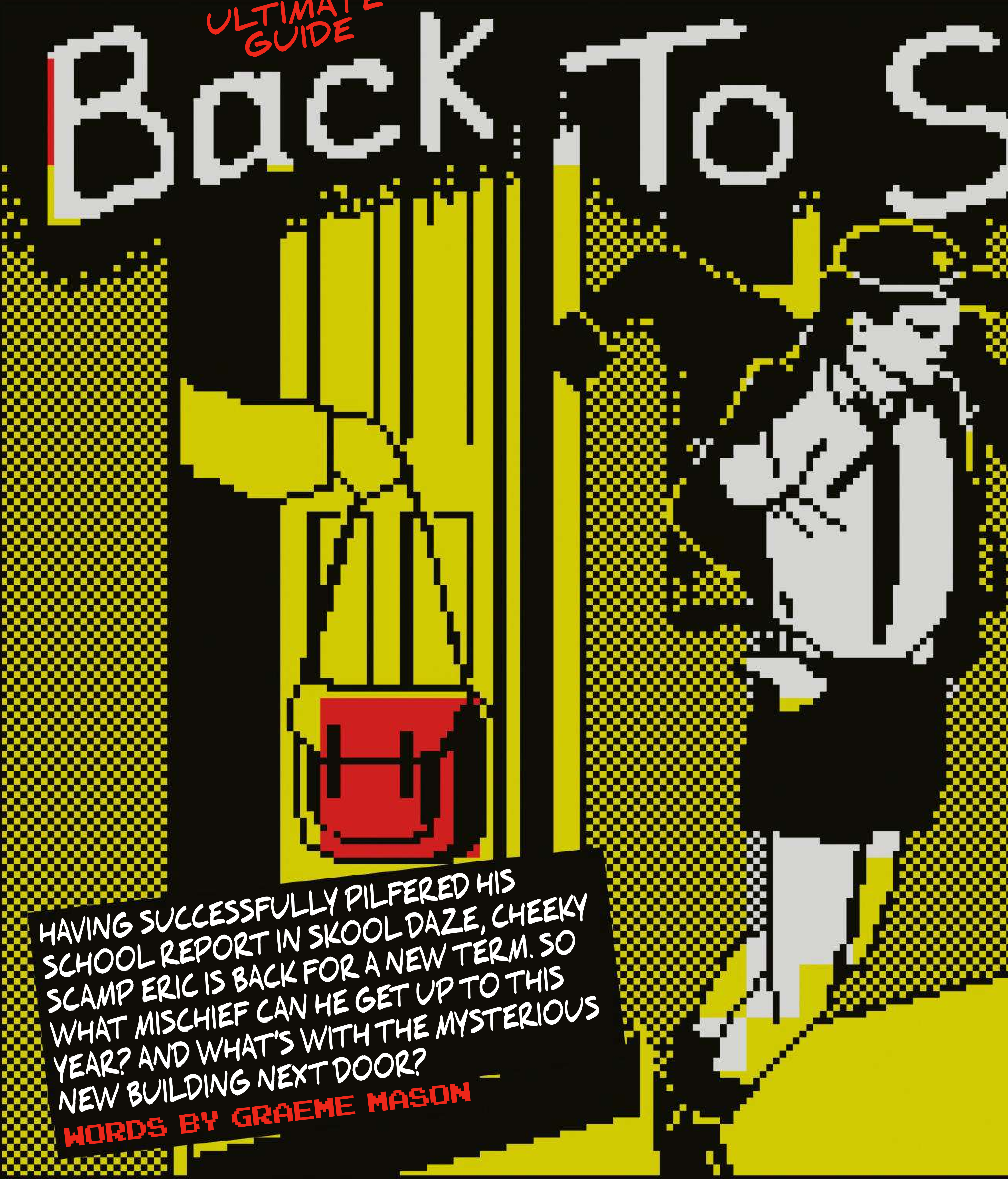
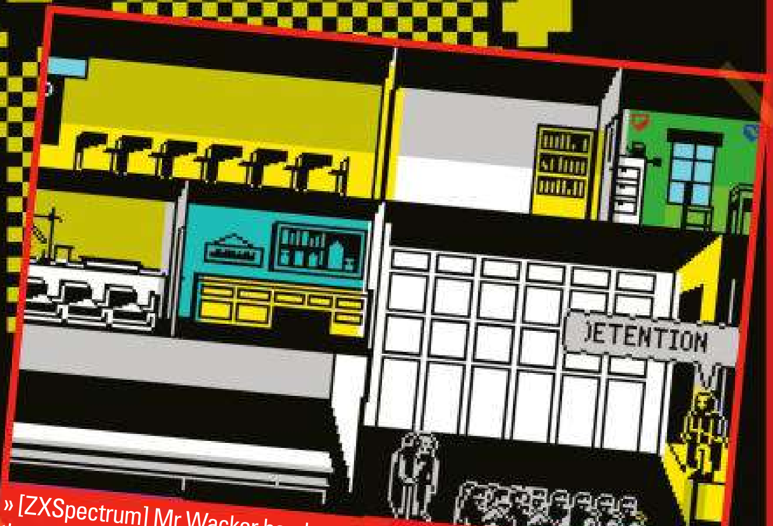
ULTIMATE GUIDE



HAVING SUCCESSFULLY PILFERED HIS SCHOOL REPORT IN SKOOL DAZE, CHEEKY SCAMP ERIC IS BACK FOR A NEW TERM. SO WHAT MISCHIEF CAN HE GET UP TO THIS YEAR? AND WHAT'S WITH THE MYSTERIOUS NEW BUILDING NEXT DOOR?

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



» [ZXSpectrum] Mr Wacker hands out the detentions during a heated assembly.

Back in issue 194 of Retro Gamer, we detailed schoolboy Eric's escapades in the Ultimate Guide to *Skool Daze*. Eric's mission was to retrieve his accurate, but damning, report from the school safe in that game. Having accomplished this task (and thus avoided a severe telling-off from his parents), Eric has spent all summer doctoring his report, turning him into a bright, studious and sweet-natured student. There's just one problem. Our hero needs to get the – ahem – slightly amended document back into the school safe before the head notices its absence. It's time to get *Back To Skool*.

However, when Eric returns from the summer break, things are slightly different. His school has undergone some extensive alterations, and there's a new building next door. Under the gaze of a stern headmistress, this is a girls' school, which includes, coincidentally and conveniently, Eric's girlfriend, Hayley. During break and lunchtimes, the two schools mingle; otherwise, the gate between the two is kept firmly locked by Albert, the caretaker, who also seals the door to Eric's school during lessons, keeping the students safe as well as ensuring – more pertinently – that none of them wander off.

Structural changes notwithstanding, Eric's school has a familiar feel to it. Class swot Einstein is still answering all the questions correctly and grassing him up; bully Angelface remains a constant physical threat, and Boy Wonder continues to cause general mayhem. Striding purposefully around the school are the teachers, Mr Rockitt (science), Mr Withit (geography), Mr Creak (history) and the patriarchal headmaster Mr Wacker, on the lookout for naughty schoolboys with his cane at the ready.

Upon entering the newly designed school, the gymnasium greets Eric, now buttressed with a stage for organised assembly. A cloakroom ▶

> "I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH OF A GAP BETWEEN FINISHING [SKOOL DAZE] AND STARTING WORK ON THE NEXT!"
> KEITH WARRINGTON

RULE THE SKOOL

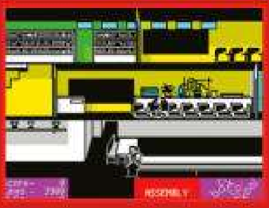
USE RETRO GAMER'S TIPS FOR SCHOOLBOY-RELATED MAYHEM

KISSES FOR LINES

■ It's a certainty that Eric will receive lines during the average day. Fortunately, Eric's girlfriend will take on some of these for our roguish student. The price? A peck on the cheek, but be careful – even the doting Hayley will eventually get fed up.

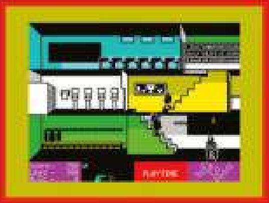
SEARCH DESKS

■ The water pistol and stink bombs are two essential items. The former is required to fill up the cups that yield bike combination numbers when spilt over teachers; the latter for forcing the head to open a window, ie an escape route.



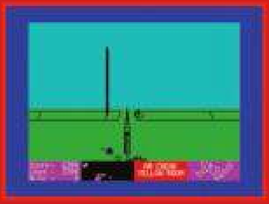
GET THE BIKE COMBINATION

■ Unlocking your bike is the primary objective in *Back To Skool*. The stairs have a shelf with three cups. Shoot water into these before catapulting them when a teacher wanders underneath.



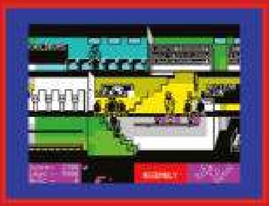
GATE VAULTING

■ There's a trick Eric can employ once he's unlocked his bike. Pedal as fast as you can before standing on the bike and reaching the locked gate. If timed correctly, he will spring off the cycle when it crashes and vault into the neighbouring school.



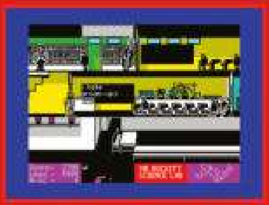
STICK TO THE TIMETABLE

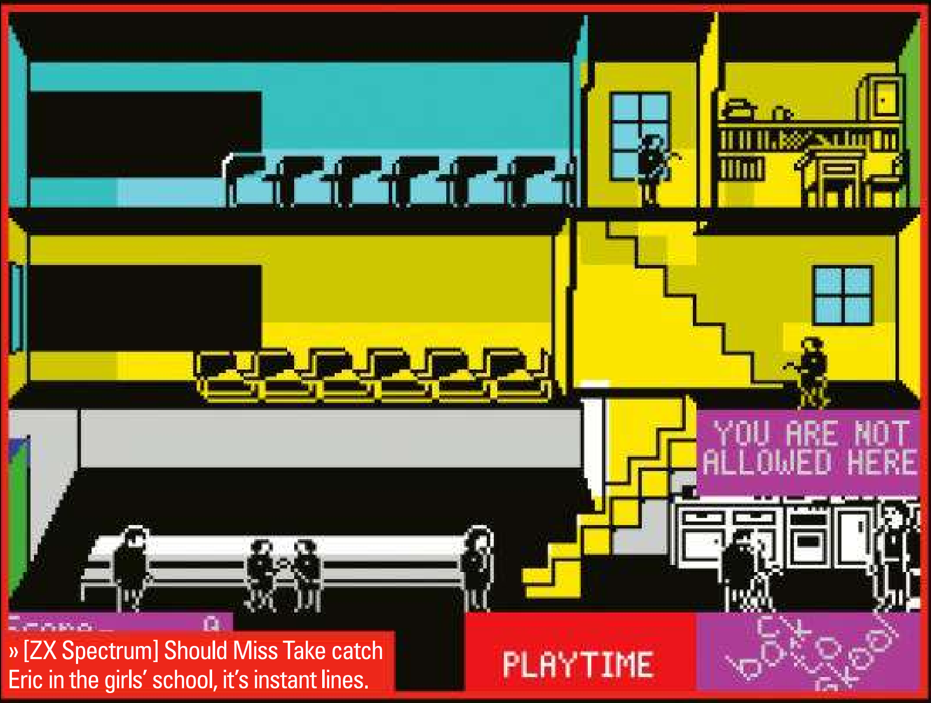
■ *Back To Skool* contains an active world that proceeds at its own pace in-game. Lessons are punctuated by the assembly and break times, and each has to be observed – to a reasonable degree.



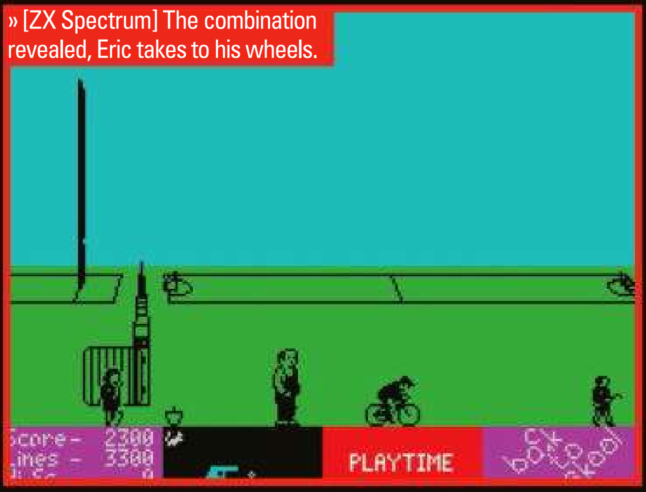
THE EINSTEIN TRICK

■ Skip a class or punch Angelface? Einstein will let the teacher know, bringing Eric instant punishment. However, you can sit on the swot in class whenever he starts to grass, knocking him to the floor. Repeat until the end of the lesson, whereupon he gives up.





» [ZX Spectrum] Should Miss Take catch Eric in the girls' school, it's instant lines.



» [ZX Spectrum] The combination revealed, Eric takes to his wheels.

is past the long dinner table and steps lead up to the next floor. Rather sensibly, the school now has a toilet, while across the hall from the urinals is the science classroom. Past the trophy cabinet and up the stairs, and there's the library and two more classrooms. Finally, in the top-right part of the school is the staff office, its door normally closed and firmly locked. Inside is Eric's ultimate objective, the school safe.

Outside, once past the giant tree, a rugby field sits in the distance. Should Eric nip past the gate and into the girls' school, a hockey field lays next before the small building itself. Perhaps reflecting the time, there's another long table, two classrooms and a kitchen in this school. Headmistress Miss Take prowls these rooms, casting a protective eye over Hayley and her other charges, the school's hockey-stick-wielding students.

Within this free environment, the player guides Eric, attending lessons, patiently sitting during assembly and catching precious moments with Hayley during break and lunch. Like its forebear, the beauty of *Back To Skool* is that, if you wish, you can enjoy the school day, getting into scrapes whenever you fancy while patiently listening to Mr Creak witter on about some obscure historical event. Or, also like *Skool Daze*, you can combat the game's labyrinthine instructions and puzzles to return Eric's report to the headmaster's safe.

Fortunately, Eric's older brother is here to help. The unnamed sibling has handily

> "[THE REIDYS WERE NICE PEOPLE, AND DAVE WAS A GENIUS WHO WROTE MACHINE CODE OUT OF HIS HEAD."
> KEITH WARRINGTON

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER CHATS WITH KEITH WARRINGTON, MICROSPHERE'S IN-HOUSE ARTIST

» Keith Warrington in 1984 (left) and 2012.

How early did Microsphere decide on a sequel to *Skool Daze*?
Fairly soon I guess – I don't remember much of a gap between finishing one and starting work on the next!

Had the success of *Skool Daze* taken you by surprise then?
I wasn't really aware of any success and didn't really discuss it with Dave [Reidy]. He was a very self-effacing sort of guy and interested with what he could do with code, while I was more interested in what I could do with the pencil.

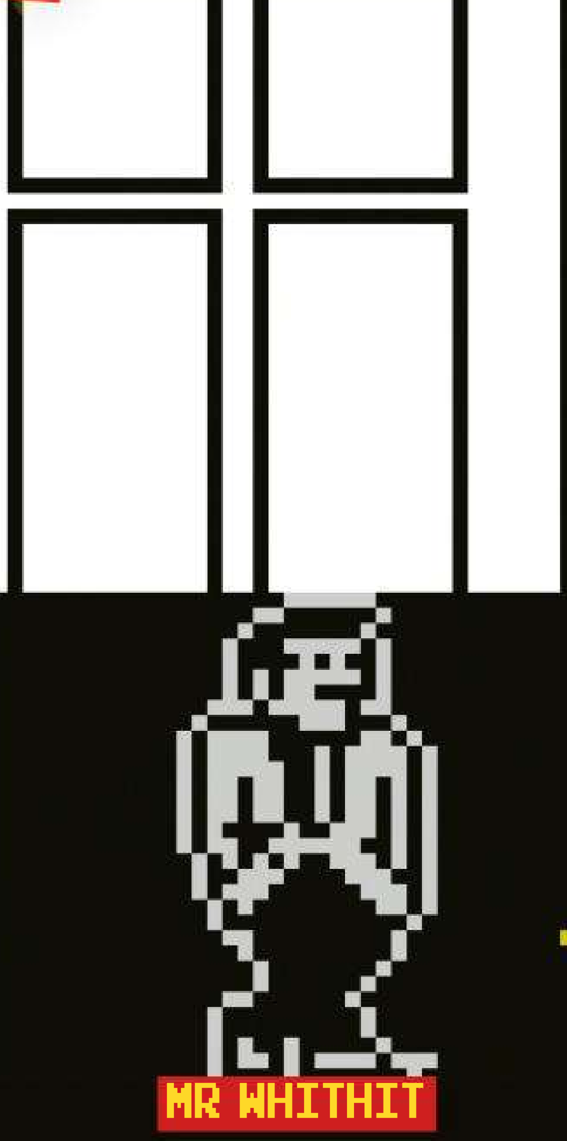
How did you go about designing the graphics for *Back To Skool*?
I got large pieces of graph paper and filled in squares, then screwed my eyes up to try and preview what it would look like on the screen. When things needed to change like the legs on a walking figure or a door opening and such like, I stuck bits of tracing paper over the original and drew the variation on. Then I'd trace that onto layout paper and stick it over so I could lift it up and down quickly like a flicky book to see how it worked.

What was it like working with the Reidys?
They were nice people and Dave was a genius who wrote machine code out of his head. Helen had been my next door neighbour when we were kids so I knew they were decent folk. Sometimes, I was a bit slow as I was doing a PGCE at the time and I think that might have frustrated Dave when he needed something quick. But overall it was a pleasant experience.

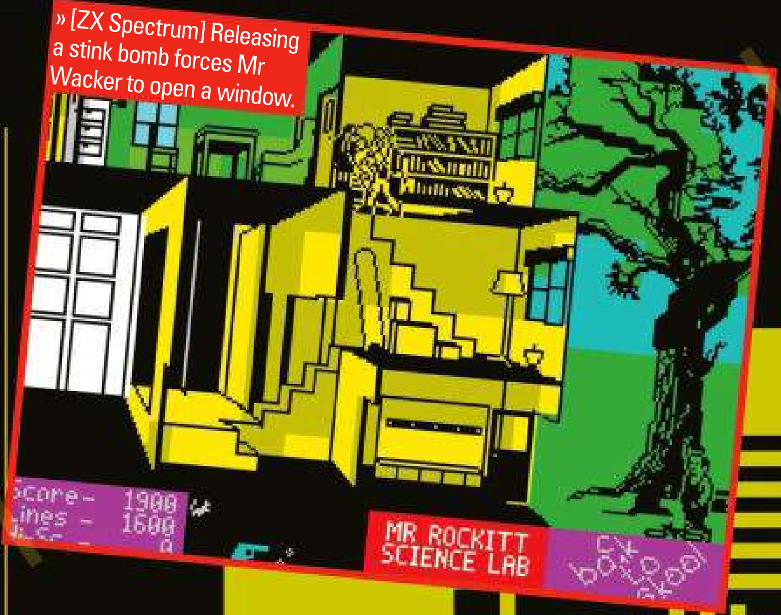
Did you do the cover artwork as well?
Yes that was me, although it wasn't my natural style. I was an airbrusher so 'Sideprint' being a more business and programmers app got me a more photographic style.

Do you know what happened with the third game, *Eric And Hayley's Decathlon*?
At the time *Back To Skool* came out, there was another popular game called *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. So Dave thought he could do a game introducing the school sports day and use a play on words from the other game's title. I don't have the artwork unfortunately as it went missing with quite a lot of other work during my second house move. And as I've said before, I had no input in the gaming format of the games, so I don't know how the sports were actually going to work or feature.

Our thanks to Keith for his time.



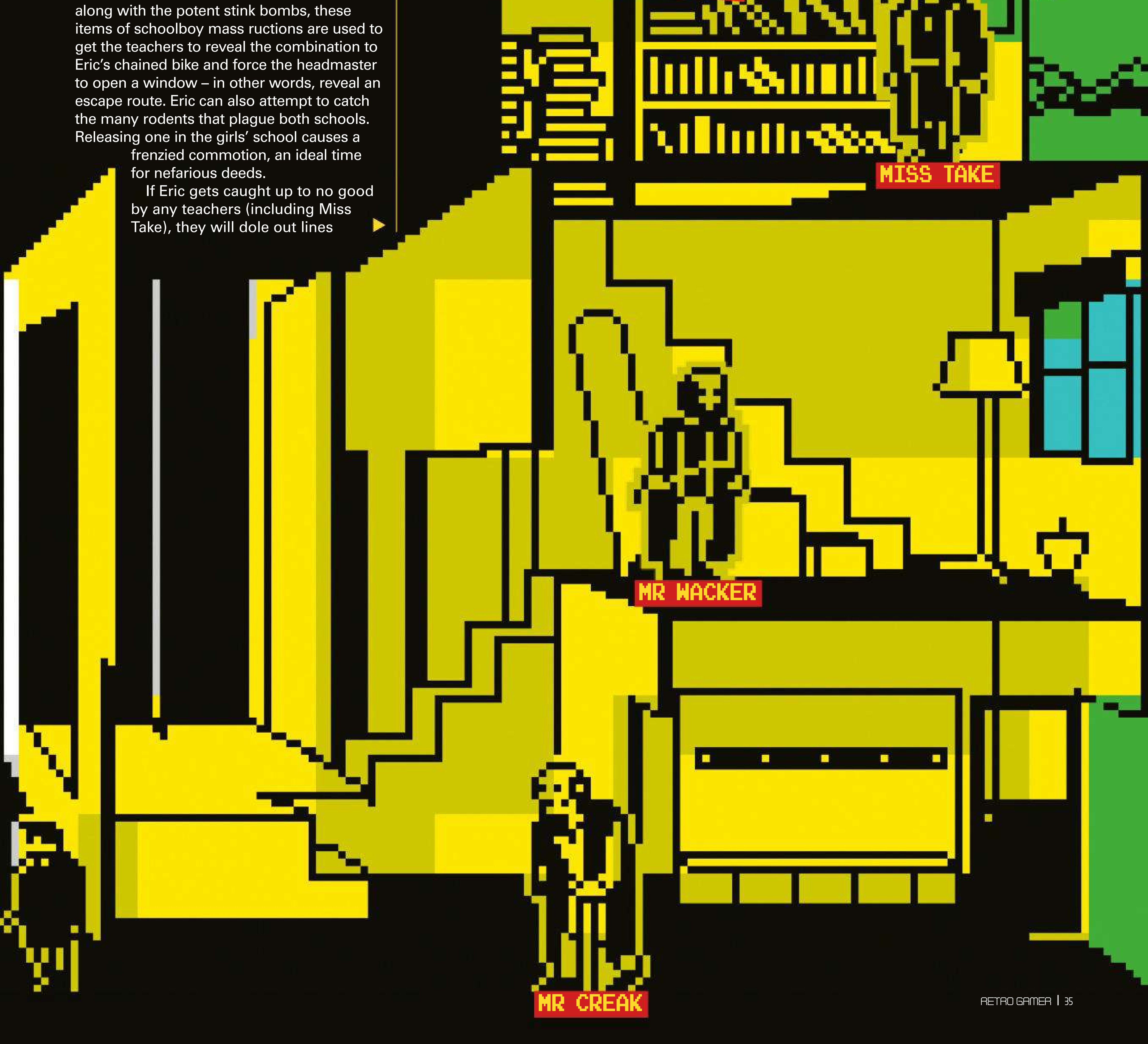
MR WHITHIT



» [ZX Spectrum] Releasing a stink bomb forces Mr Wacker to open a window.

written out a set of rules, sacred rubrics for surviving school, aptly scribbled in invisible ink. "Key to safe round nek of gurls hedmistris," he notes. Clearly, Eric's brother should have studied more, but these tips are invaluable in informing the player how to get Eric's report back into the safe. The faculty may have removed many of the shields from the first game, but there's still plenty for Eric to do. The first task is to find those stereotypical schoolboy weapons, the water pistol and stink bomb. Hidden inside school desks inside the classrooms of both schools, along with the potent stink bombs, these items of schoolboy mass ructions are used to get the teachers to reveal the combination to Eric's chained bike and force the headmaster to open a window – in other words, reveal an escape route. Eric can also attempt to catch the many rodents that plague both schools. Releasing one in the girls' school causes a frenzied commotion, an ideal time for nefarious deeds.

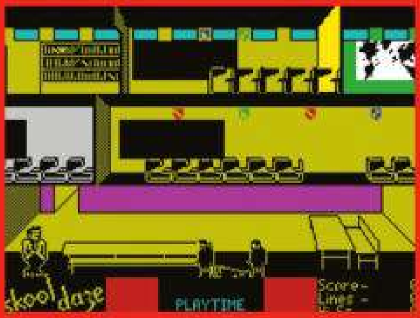
If Eric gets caught up to no good by any teachers (including Miss Take), they will dole out lines ▶



MORE FROM MICROSPHERE

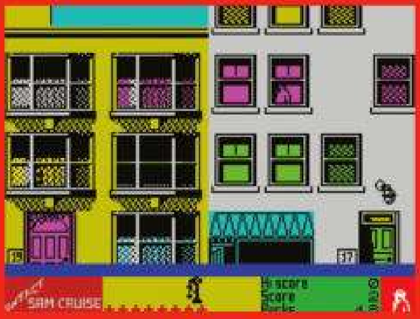
TRY THESE DIVERSE GEMS

SKOOL DAZE



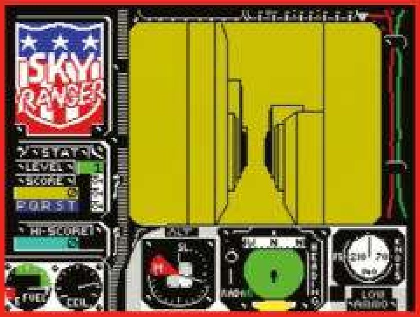
■ The classic where it all began. Guide Eric (or whatever you rename him) around the school, striking those numerous shields and stunning teachers into revealing part of the safe combination. Why? Because inside it is Eric's damning report. Sweet, innocent and startlingly novel, *Skool Daze* is a solid A+.

CONTACT SAM CRUISE



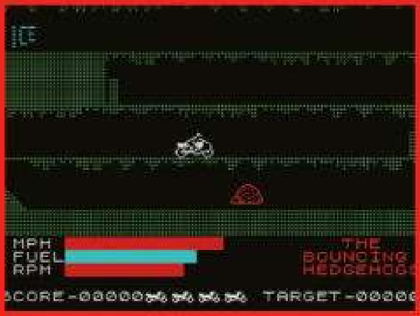
■ Microsphere took the look of the *Skool* games and transposed it to a Thirties detective drama. Controlling the eponymous investigator, the player solves their clients' problems while staying alive and collecting cash by somersaulting. *Contact Sam Cruise* is another wonderful game from Microsphere.

SKY RANGER



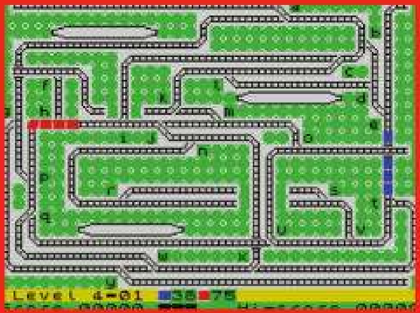
■ After *Skool Daze*, Dave Reidy turned his hand at a different type of game. *Sky Ranger* is a futuristic helicopter sim as the player takes on the robotic overlords that reign over their city. Despite its beautiful and fast graphics, *Sky Ranger*'s thin content disappointed most on release, although it's a technical marvel.

WHEELIE

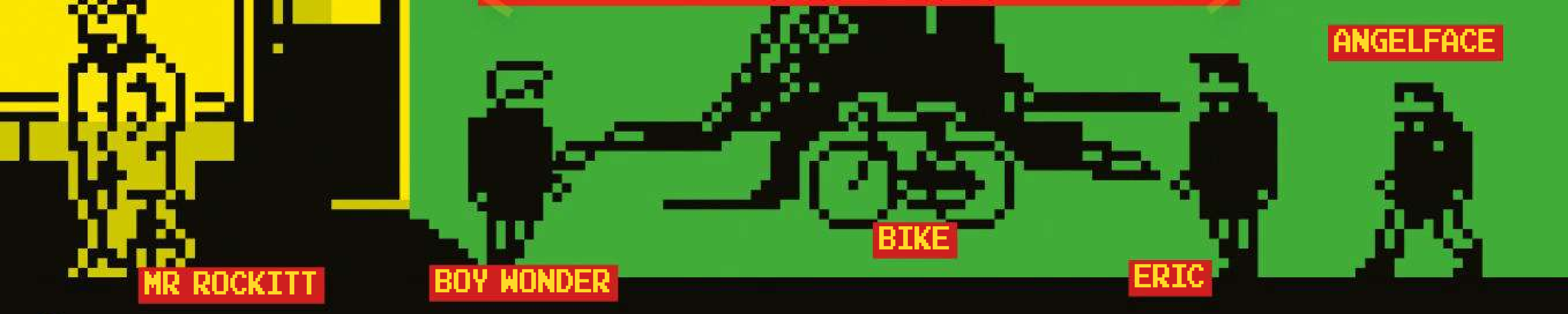


■ *Wheelie* is where it all truly began for Microsphere. Bestowed with a 'Game Of The Month' in issue two of *Crash*, it's the tale of a daring biker plummeting headlong into the perilous realm of the Ghostrider. With its colossal bouncing hedgehogs and fast action, there's no doubt this is a wheelie excellent game. [You're fired – Ed]

THE TRAIN GAME



■ Microsphere's first game takes the old pastime of train sets and squeezes tracks, trains and more into the Spectrum. Twenty five sets of points are dotted around each track, and, as controller, the player manipulates these to pick up passengers and avoid disasters. While the result is not totally convincing, its originality hinted at Microsphere's potential.



> "I GOT LARGE PIECES OF GRAPH PAPER AND FILLED IN SQUARES, THEN SCREWED MY EYES UP TO TRY AND PREVIEW WHAT IT WOULD LOOK LIKE ON THE SCREEN"
> **KEITH WARRINGTON**

in an angry rectangular speech bubble. Only the school's caretaker, Albert, cannot punish Eric, instead hollering out to Mr Wacker, "He's escaping!" As in *Skool Daze*, if Eric collects 10,000 or more lines, he is summarily expelled, ending the game.

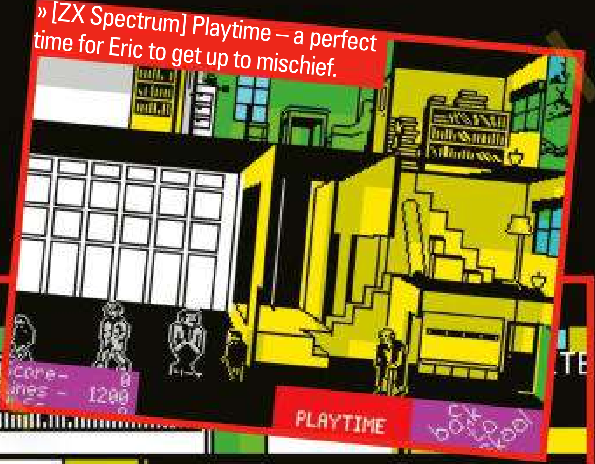
Unfortunately, lines are inevitable in *Back To Skool*, one of the most byzantine games ever to appear on the ZX Spectrum. Freed the bike and got Mr Wacker to open a window? Now it's time to make your escape during lessons so that Eric can grab the sherry from Miss Take's office. Sherry secured? Now get the teachers tipsy, so they reveal the combination to the locked science lab storeroom. Inside there is a frog, and the little fellow is jumping for joy, having been freed by Eric. However, better grab it quick, for this overexcited amphibian is required to shock Miss Take (yes, back to the girls' school) into dropping her key to the headmaster's office.

As with most of Microsphere's games, *Back To Skool* was a Spectrum exclusive (its predecessor was the exception; it also appeared on the Commodore 64). Curiously, coder Dave Reidy includes a countdown at the beginning of the game; pressing a key during this timer takes the player to the 'cast of characters' screen, with each figure from the game trotting onto the screen. Once more, you can rename any or all of the game's characters, giving *Back To Skool* a real-life ambience that few Spectrum games achieved. Unfortunately, the game also includes several bugs, including the ability to kiss your girlfriend through the school gates, which, if timed right, can warp Eric through the metal bars. Less useful is jumping out of the top window, which leaves the hero in a crumpled heap on the floor. Adding salt to the wound is Mr Wacker, who sternly informs Eric he is "not a bird" before expelling his inanimate form.

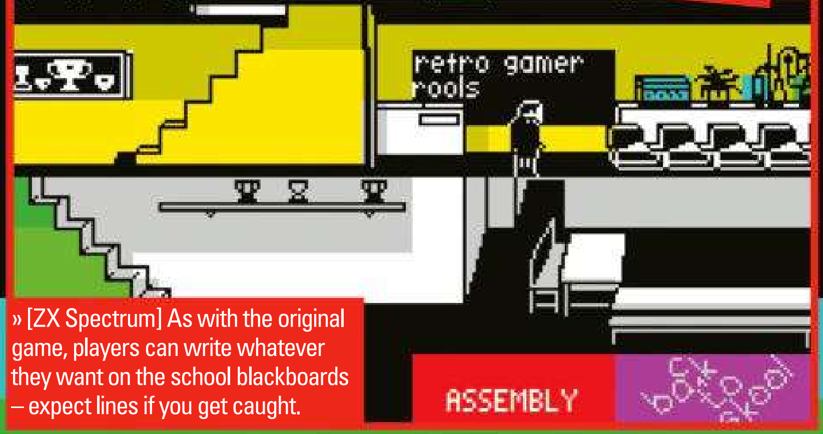
None of this mattered when *Back To Skool* was released to uniformly high praise at the end of 1985. "This is a very involving and tough arcade adventure," noted one reviewer in the game's *Crash* Smash review. "Overall, it's a fantastic game that is well worth the asking price."

Sinclair User's Chris Bourne heaped even more adulation, and in doing so neatly summed up the mayhem of *Back To Skool*. "The graphics are fabulous, still the same cartoon-like boys and masters lurking in the corridors, the same melee at dinner, the same scramble for seats in overcrowded classrooms. Although it's still extremely difficult to get far in the quest, that won't stop you having a good time."

It was a thoroughly deserved reception for an expanded take on an already-fine game, the addition of another school, more items and characters earning *Back To Skool* a place as one of the finest ZX Spectrum games of all time. ✱



» [ZX Spectrum] Playtime – a perfect time for Eric to get up to mischief.



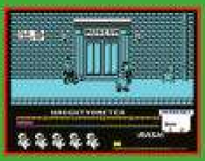
» [ZX Spectrum] As with the original game, players can write whatever they want on the school blackboards – expect lines if you get caught.

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

MORE YOUTHFUL SPECTRUM CAPERS

JACK THE NIPPER

■ Jack is a *very* naughty boy, and he has decided today is the day to cause pandemonium throughout his town. First task: grab that peashooter. Then it's off to the launderette to use all the washing powder.



THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE

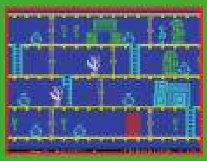
■ The star of this Firebird budget game has been framed for stealing the headmaster's wallet. With the threat of a caning, you must clear your name by finding the lost wallet.

SUPERKID

■ Tom Essex is just your typical schoolboy until he stumbles into his uncle's laboratory and guzzles a bottle of secret formula. Transformed into Superkid, Tom can now fly and possesses super strength – so get out there and clean up the streets.

BOOTY

■ Cabin Boy Jim has rebelled against his piratical masters and is collecting all their treasure for himself. But these corsairs are a suspicious bunch and have locked all the doors on the ship. Fortunately, they're careless and have left the keys strewn all around.

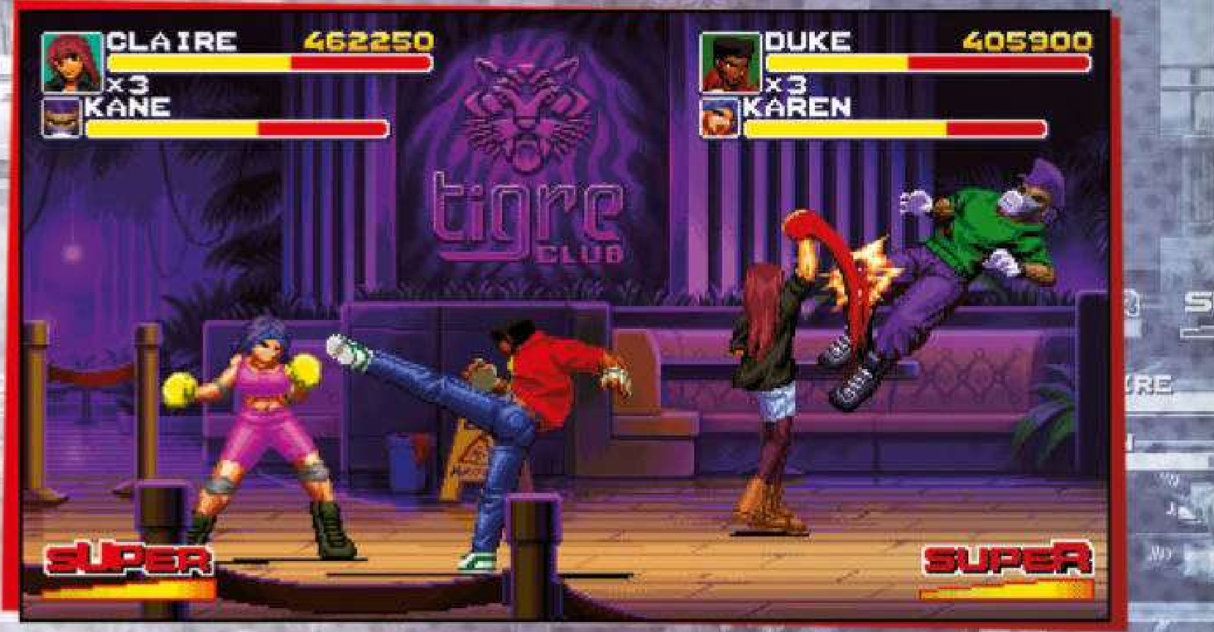


HERBERT'S DUMMY RUN

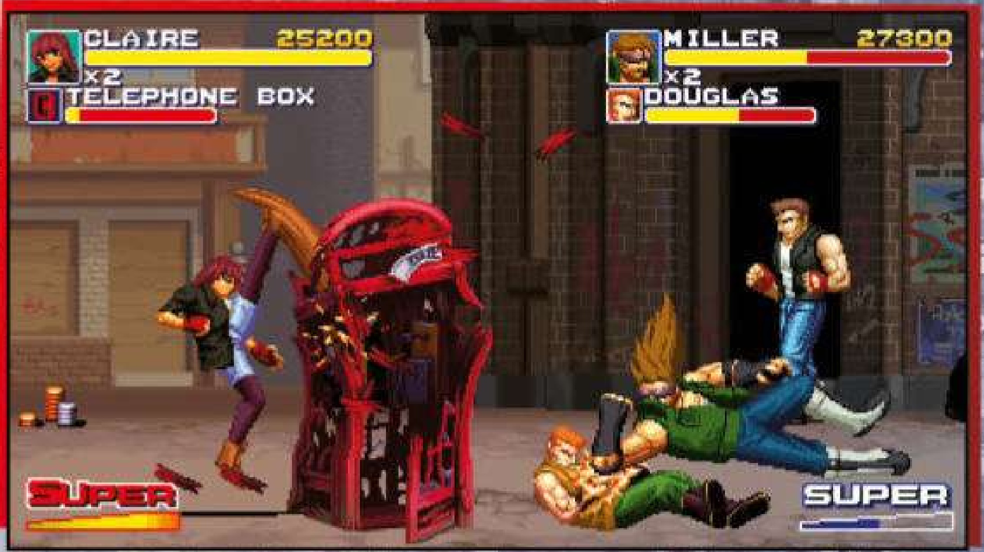
■ Wally and Wilma have taken Herbert to an enormous department store and carelessly mislaid him. Herbert combines objects and solves puzzles so he can gain entry to the lost children office where his parents await him.

FINAL
VENDETTA

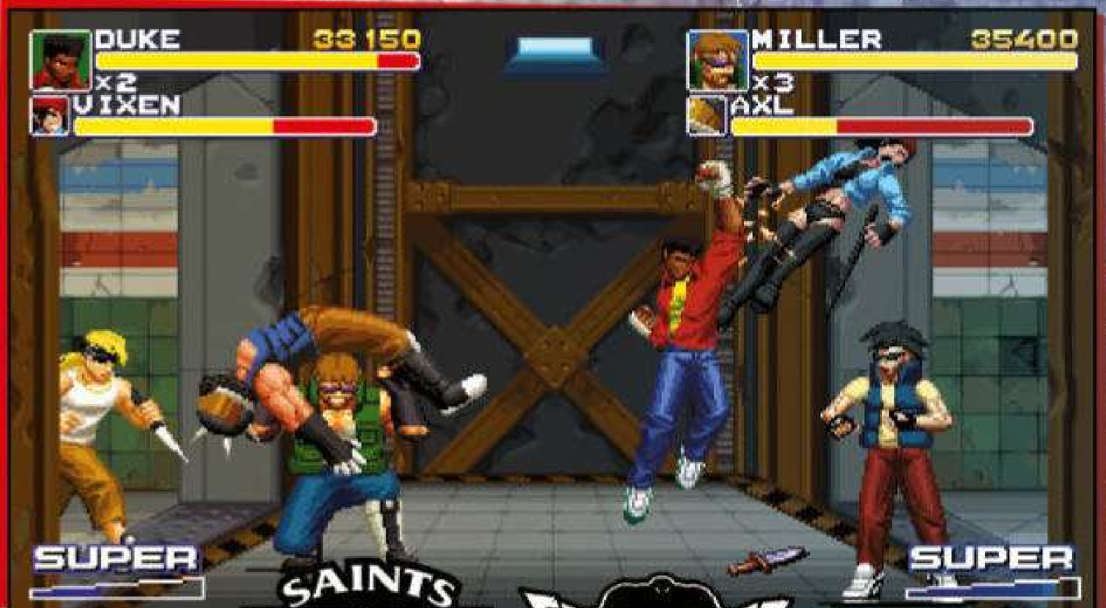
TIME TO TAKE OUT THE TRASH!


CLAIRE 462250
x3
KANE
DUKE 405900
x3
KAREN
tigre CLUB
SUPER
SUPER

The notorious "Syndic8" gang are seizing control of the capital! Adding to their crimes, they have kidnapped Claire Sparks' younger sister. Refusing to admit defeat, Claire teams up with her friends – retired pro-wrestler Miller T. Williams and Duke Sancho, the streetwise, bare-knuckle fighter.


CLAIRE 25200
x2
TELEPHONE BOX
MILLER 27300
x2
DOUGLAS
SUPER
SUPER

Together they must battle and brawl their way through the mean streets of London in a perilous mission to reunite Claire with her sister.


DUKE 33150
x2
VIXEN
MILLER 35400
x3
AXL
SUPER
SUPER

- STUNNING PIXEL ART
- 1 OR 2 PLAYER CO-OP
- 3 PLAYABLE CHARACTERS
- 4 GAME MODES
- THUMPING DANCE TECHNO TRACKS FROM UTAH SAINTS AND FEATURECAST.

UTAH SAINTS FEATURECAST

FINAL VENDETTA

Collector's Edition

OST CD

DECK OF 32 COLLECTIBLE CARDS

A RADICAL STICKER!

Super Limited Edition

DECK OF 32 COLLECTIBLE CARDS

BARREL USB

A4 ARTBOOK

A2 POSTER

OST CD

A RADICAL STICKER!

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NINTENDO SWITCH PS4 PS5 STEAM XBOX

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THE STORY OF E3

OFTEN REFERRED TO AS 'CHRISTMAS FOR GAMERS', E3 HAS BEEN THE FOCUS OF BIG ANNOUNCEMENTS AND HARDWARE REVEALS SINCE 1995. RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT HOW VIDEOGAMING'S PREMIER EVENT GOT STARTED, AND HOW IT HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

Before E3 became the highlight of the gaming world's calendar, videogame publishers would exhibit their wares at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), which was held every January in Las Vegas and every June in Chicago. But by the early Nineties, the industry's higher-ups had become increasingly frustrated with the organisers of CES. "They treated the videogame industry terribly, in my opinion," says Tom Kalinske, former president and CEO of Sega Of America. "They put us in the back of the big convention centre. You had to walk by all the cool stuff, all the new computers and new TVs and they had a big pornography section with scantily clad ladies passing out autographed pictures of themselves. And you had to walk by all this to get to the videogame section way in the back.

"So that was kind of annoying to start with, and then it got even worse. That particular year, they didn't even put us in the back of the convention hall, they put us out the door under a tent outside in the parking lot – and the tent leaked. So there was water leaking over my Sega Genesis hardware, and I said to my staff, 'That's it, we're never coming back here again.'"

Pat Ferrell, cofounder of *GamePro* magazine, was well aware of the tension that existed between CES and the games industry at this point. He sent an emissary to a CES meeting where games industry executives were invited to air their concerns. "She came back and said, 'Man, they are furious, they are really pissed off,'" he recalls. Sensing an opportunity, and with the backing of *GamePro*'s publisher, IDG, Pat began touting the concept for a videogame-only show – the Electronic Entertainment Expo.

» John Romero, Warren Spector and Mike Wilson at E3 2000.

At around the same time in 1994, the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) was formed by various game publishers, including Sega, in response to a 1993 US Congress hearing about violent videogames like *Mortal Kombat*. The IDSA (which was renamed to the Entertainment Software Association in 2003) rushed to develop a ratings system for games to satisfy Congress' demands. But gathering game publishers together created another effect. "Now that we had our own association, it seemed logical that we should have our own show," says Tom.

In the hope of winning back the favour of disgruntled games executives, CES head Gary Shapiro organised a meeting with the IDSA in 1994 to propose a CES spin-off show that would be exclusively focused on videogames. Pat was set to present the IDSA with his rival idea for E3 straight after Gary Shapiro, but he almost didn't make it, being under the impression that the meeting was on a Friday rather than a Thursday. He was eating in a restaurant when he received a message asking why he wasn't giving his presentation – sparking a frantic drive across town. "I ended up going into the meeting with tomato sauce on my shirt, my tie still tucked into my shirt…" he laughs. "The only thing I was missing was a napkin from eating the pasta." Despite his late arrival, Pat managed to persuade the IDSA to support E3 – although not everyone was on board. "Nintendo and Microsoft immediately announced that they were going with CES," recalls Pat. "And then we went to war."

Pat's camp began to drum up support for E3 by sending out postcards with cartoons poking fun at the leaky tents and 'porta potties' of CES events. "They were really funny," he chuckles. But he credits Bill White, former vice president of marketing at Sega, with dreaming up the decisive blow in the E3/CES war. "Bill said, 'I think you should change your dates. I think you should drop them right on top of Gary's.'" E3 was originally scheduled to take place in early summer 1995 in Las Vegas, while the rival CES games show was set for May in Philadelphia. Now Pat booked the Los Angeles Convention Center for the exact same dates as the CES show. "What was happening before was people were saying, 'You know what, I'll just go to both. It'll cost me more, but I'll just send a skeleton crew to one of the two,'" he says. "But once I dropped my dates on top of his, you didn't have a choice." The audacious move saw E3 quickly gain momentum as games companies that were wavering between the two shows signed up to attend Pat's fledgling event.

Soon, the day arrived when both E3 and CES needed to pay the non-refundable deposits for their respective venues. "And it's not trivial," says Pat. "It's like $150,000. It's a big number." By this point, Pat had signed up enough attendees that he was confident of putting on a show. "Gary didn't [feel confident]," he continues, "and it's God's true story that my assistant came in and said, 'Gary Shapiro's on the phone.' And I said, 'Patch him in.' And he said, 'Pat, you win,' and hung up. And that afternoon, he announced they were closing their show."

Pat soon had Nintendo asking for exhibition space at E3 now that the CES spin-off was defunct. "These guys were like, 'So where are we in the South Hall?'" recalls Pat (the South Hall being the biggest and thus most prestigious part of the LA Convention Center). "I said, 'I'm sorry, I'm out of room,'" continues Pat. "And they go, 'That's not funny. We're Nintendo.' And I go, 'You bet on the wrong horse.'" The latecomers Nintendo and Microsoft ended up being relegated to the smaller West Hall, but as compensation, Pat arranged it so visitors would enter the venue via the West rather than the South Hall to ensure plenty of footfall past the companies' booths.

That first E3 in May 1995 was a monster. "If you look at Wikipedia, it says we had 55,000 people," says Pat. ▶

» Thomas Puha started off as European correspondent for US magazine *Gamefan*, and first attended E3 in 1998. He is now communications manager for the Finnish game developer Remedy Entertainment.

» Pat Ferrell founded *GamePro* magazine, and with the backing of *GamePro*'s publisher, IDG, he spearheaded the creation of the first E3.

» Tom Kalinske was president and CEO of Sega Of America between 1990 and 1996, and was one of E3's biggest supporters in the early days.

E3 TIMELINE

THE KEY GAMES AND BIG REVEALS OF PAST E3 SHOWS

1995

KEY GAMES

Ridge Racer (PS1)
Killer Instinct (SNES)
Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest (SNES)
Panzer Dragoon (Saturn)

KEY REVEALS

Sony PlayStation US release date and price is revealed to be $299. Sega Saturn gets a surprise launch of $399. Nintendo showcases the Virtual Boy and also show off a near-final version of the Ultra 64, which becomes the N64.

1996

KEY GAMES

Super Mario 64 (N64)
NiGHTS Into Dreams (Saturn)
Tomb Raider (PS1)
Crash Bandicoot (PS1)

KEY REVEALS

Nintendo reveals the price of the N64, which is set at $249 and debut the 20% smaller Game Boy Pocket. Sony aggressively cuts its PlayStation to $199, making it $50 cheaper than Nintendo's N64. Sega also cuts the cost of its Saturn to $199.

1997

KEY GAMES

Metal Gear Solid (PS1)
GoldenEye 007 (N64)
Quake II (PC)
Final Fantasy VII (PS1)

KEY REVEALS

The very first trailer for *Duke Nukem Forever* is revealed. [Good luck waiting for that to come out – Ed] Sony showcases the Dual Analog controller. Early gameplay footage of *Zelda 64* is shown. Rare show off *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker's Quest*.

1998

KEY GAMES

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (N64)
Half-Life (PC)
Gran Turismo (PS1)
Pokémon Red and Blue (GB)

KEY REVEALS

Sega showcase the Dreamcast behind closed doors. Nintendo debut the Game Boy Color, along with the Game Boy Camera and Printer. Konami reveals *Silent Hill*. Crystal Dynamics announces *Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver*.

1999

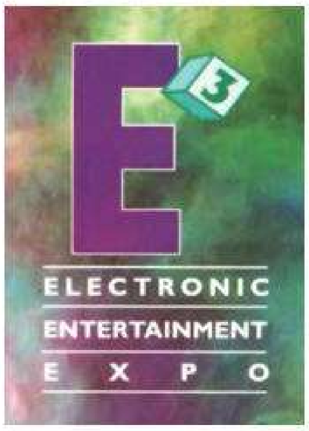
KEY GAMES

Perfect Dark (N64)
Soulcalibur (DC)
Super Smash Bros (N64)
Final Fantasy VIII (PS1)

KEY REVEALS

Nintendo announces Project Dolphin, later renamed GameCube. Dreamcast's 9/9/99 release date is revealed, priced at $199. Sony demonstrates graphics for its next-generation PlayStation. Rare showcases *Perfect Dark*, *Jet Force Gemini* and *Donkey Kong 64*.

» Patrick Klepek is a senior reporter for Waypoint and has made plenty of friends at E3. He's been reporting on the show since he was 14.



» Interestingly, the show was always meant to be called E^3 rather than E3. "It was like E to the power of three, right?" says Pat. But reporters complained about having to type a superscript three, and Pat quickly gave up insisting that it was 'cubed' not 'three'.

"Bullshit, I would say it was much closer to 80,000. We filled every goddamn hotel in LA. We filled all the hotels in Long Beach, we filled all the hotels in Santa Monica, and not only did we fill their rooms, but we filled their meeting spaces, it was all gone." Back in those early days, people could be let into E3 by simply turning up at the door with a business card to show they were in the games industry, and E3 1995 got so crowded that the fire marshal threatened to shut down the event on the second day. But Pat's team managed to redirect the flow of people to avoid too much overcrowding, and the show was given a reprieve.

The parties were nothing short of legendary that year. "Sony had Michael Jackson perform at their party – I mean, it was unbelievable," says Pat. Shuttle buses took attendees to glittering events all over the city. Pat's own company held a party with Crystal Dynamics in a music producer's mansion up in the hills, which featured performers from Cirque du Soleil, with catering provided by celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck.

The show floor was equally star-studded. "It was a very exciting time, a very exciting place," says Tom, who remembers that Muhammad Ali was a notable attendee at the Sega booth. "We had celebrities come in and out, and so did everybody else." It was incredibly noisy, too. Sony's booth was next to Sega's, and the two got into something of a war over who could play their music the loudest. "I think the heads of the IDSA came around and said, 'Hey, you guys gotta cut this [out], you're gonna break everybody's eardrums, it's too noisy,'" says Tom. "I don't think we did though." The competition between Sega and Sony was incredibly fierce at the time, and the most notable event of E3 1995 was Sony's Steve Race announcing the PlayStation would retail for $299, just after Tom had said the Saturn would cost $399 (see Standout Moments boxout). Tom claims that wasn't the only time Steve punctured Sega's ambitions at the show, "We had these big Sonic inflatable characters around, and he'd have his guys come and stick pins in them and deflate them," he says.

Image credits: ESA

After such a strong first year, games companies were clamouring to grab a space in the LA Convention Center for E3 1996. That year saw Nintendo showcase *Super Mario 64* on its brand-new N64 console, while the competition hotted up between Sega and Sony, with both manufacturers slashing the price of its consoles to $199. This second E3 would also be Pat's last as showrunner, and the IDSA would go on to buy the rights to E3 from IDG – although it still hired the media firm to run the event.

Electronic Entertainment Expo
E3

» E3 1996: the show was again held in the LA Convention Center for its second year, but E3 would relocate to Atlanta for 1997 and 1998. Come 1999, however, it was back in LA, where it remained.

Image credits: Pat Ferrell and Infotainment World.

Then things took a surprising turn in 1997, when E3 was relocated to the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta. Tom Kalinske had left Sega by that point, but he attended E3 1997, and he thinks that the relocation to Atlanta was a big mistake. "The heart of the entertainment industry is Hollywood, and that's LA," he says. Pat agrees that the relocation to Atlanta was a bad move. "Everybody hated it," he says. "The venue was too big and wasn't personal enough." Not only that, he adds, moving to Atlanta meant Japanese visitors had to catch several connecting flights to reach the show, instead of taking a direct flight to LA.

Despite the negative feedback, E3 remained in Atlanta for the 1998 show, which was also the first E3 that Thomas Puha attended. Thomas is now communications director for Remedy Entertainment, but back in the late-Nineties he was a European correspondent for the US magazine *Gamefan*. He vividly remembers watching Shigeru Miyamoto on stage during the Nintendo press conference, as the legendary game maker promoted *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. "They gave every attendee a Nintendo messenger bag that I still see some industry people rocking," he

2000

KEY GAMES

Conker's Bad Fur Day (N64)
Neverwinter Nights (PC)
Black & White (PC)
Jet Set Radio (DC)

KEY REVEALS

A stunning trailer for *Metal Gear Solid 2* steals the show. Nintendo announces that the GameCube will be released in autumn 2001. Microsoft announces that the Xbox is coming in 2001. Sega reveals plans for its SegaNet online service.

2001

KEY GAMES

Gran Turismo 3 (PS2)
Final Fantasy X (PS2)
Metal Gear Solid 2 (PS2)
Super Smash Bros Melee (GC)

KEY REVEALS

Rockstar reveals *Grand Theft Auto III*, the first 3D game in the series. Shigeru Miyamoto demonstrates Nintendo's wireless WaveBird controller for GameCube. Capcom debuts *Devil May Cry*. *Halo: Combat Evolved* is demoed, but suffers from poor framerates.

2002

KEY GAMES

Doom III (PC)
Metroid Prime (GC)
Tekken 4 (PS2)
TimeSplitters 2 (GC/PS2/XB)

KEY REVEALS

Sony announces its Network Adapter for the PS2 in an attempt to battle Microsoft's online plans. Microsoft details the launch of Xbox Live, which ultimately wins out. Blizzard unveils its new MMORPG *World Of Warcraft*. EA demonstrates *Battlefield 1942*.

2003

KEY GAMES

Half-Life 2 (PC)
Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time (GC/PS2/XB)
Call Of Duty (PC)
Fable (XB)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft shows a movie of *Halo 2*, which proves to be very popular. Sony shows a trailer for *Gran Turismo 4* and also reveals its new peripheral called PlayStation EyeToy. It also announces the PlayStation Portable.

2004

KEY GAMES

Halo 2 (XB)
Splinter Cell 3 (XB)
Burnout 3 (XB/PS2)
Resident Evil 4 (GC)

KEY REVEALS

Nintendo reveals a prototype version of its dual-screen handheld it calls the DS. It also shows the first footage of *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* to much delight. Sony demonstrates the PSP on the show floor. *God Of War* is revealed for PlayStation 2.

2005

KEY GAMES

Spore (PC)
The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess (GC)
Gears Of War (X360)
Nintendogs (DS)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft announces the launch of the Xbox 360 later in the year. Sony announces the PlayStation 3. Nintendo shows a mock-up of its Revolution console. The Game Boy Micro is revealed and it's as small as the name suggests.

STANDOUT MOMENTS

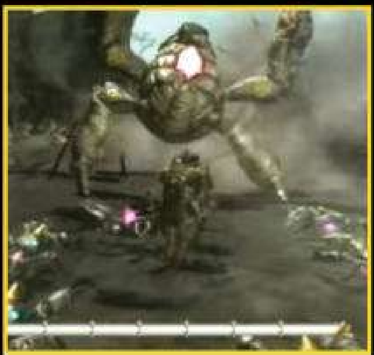
THE BIGGEST HAPPENINGS AT E3 DOWN THE YEARS

E3 1995: THE SONY/ SEGA PRICE WAR

■ The first E3 saw the surprise launch of the Sega Saturn for $399, much against the wishes of Tom Kalinske. "Everybody knows I was not a big fan of doing Saturn," he says. "At that time, I still thought we had another good year or two out of Genesis." Shortly after this, Sony dropped a bombshell. "My former colleague, Steve Race, gets up and announces the PlayStation, and just says the price, 299," recalls Tom. "That was all he said, and he walked off the stage – and of course, that got a big hoot."

E3 2004: MIYAMOTO COMES OUT SWINGING

■ Nintendo's press conference at E3 2004 is often regarded as its best ever. Reggie Fils-Aimé showed off the DS for the first time, casually introducing a brand-new *Metroid* game to huge cheers. Then the conference ended with a trailer showing Link galloping across a field in a game that harked back to *Ocarina Of Time*. At the close, Shigeru Miyamoto strode triumphantly onto the stage while wielding the Master Sword. The crowd simply erupted with cheers and thunderous applause.



E3 2006: GIANT ENEMY CRAB

■ Sony's 2006 press conference is notorious for the reveal of the eye-watering $499 price tag for the base PS3, or $599 for a 60GB hard drive version. It's also infamous for the birth of a meme. Producer Bill Ritch introduces *Genji 2* as a historical action game which will feature famous battles that actually took place in Ancient Japan. "So here's this giant enemy crab," he deadpans as he begins playing. "Attack its weak point for massive damage."

E3 2013: THE XBOX ONE DEBACLE

■ Bizarrely, Microsoft spent much of its E3 2013 press conference talking about how you could watch TV and make Skype calls through the Xbox One, and revealed the console's price was a massive $499, chiefly because Kinect was included. But the real ire was reserved for the news that the console would be always online, and that all games would be tied to a specific account. Sony stuck the knife in with a wickedly satirical video showing that sharing games on PS4 was as simple as handing a friend a disc.

E3 2015: SONY'S TRIPLE RESURRECTION

■ "They announced *The Last Guardian*, *Final Fantasy VII Remake* and *Shenmue III* in the space of about 20 minutes," recalls Nathan Brown of Sony's E3 2015 presentation. "The noise was just unbelievable. The British cohort are naturally quite stoic and reserved at these things, tutting and rolling their eyes at the crowd going nuts for gory trailer kills or the announcement of a new *Gears Of War* or whatever. But my god, we lost our minds."

Miyamoto Image credits: Bastian Stein / XBOX E3 2013 Image credits: Sergey Galyonkin

Image credits: Thomas Puha

» Nintendo's booth at E3 1998. "In the early years, while they were building the booths days before the show would open, you could try to sneak in or get an exhibitor badge, walk around, and take a peek at what games would be shown," says Thomas Puha. "They did react to that pretty fast, and things became a lot more strict."

Image credits: ESA

» E3 2009: Thomas Puha says there were a phenomenal amount of games to see at E3 in the 2000s. "Everyone had like six to twelve games on their yearly slate, so there was so much variety and games to cover," he says. "It was a fantastic time."

» Nathan Brown was the editor of *Edge* magazine and currently offers game consultation. He also writes the popular industry newsletter *Hit Points*.

2006

KEY GAMES

Assassin's Creed (PS3/X360/PC)
BioShock (X360/PC)
Mass Effect (X360)
Wii Sports (Wii)

KEY REVEALS

Revolution, now renamed as the Wii, is demoed. Sony demonstrates the PlayStation 3 on the show floor. Microsoft announces that *Grand Theft Auto IV* will come to Xbox 360, while Konami showcases a dramatic trailer for *Metal Gear Solid 4*.

2007

KEY GAMES

Rock Band (X360/PS3)
Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare (X360/PS3/PC)
Halo 3 (X360)
Fallout 3 (X360/PS3/PC)

KEY REVEALS

Sony's PlayStation Home is introduced. Nintendo announces *Wii Fit* and the Balance Board controller and reveals that *Mario Kart Wii* will ship with a Wii Wheel controller. Sony shows new *Killzone 2* footage.

2008

KEY GAMES

Mirror's Edge (PS3/X360/PC)
LittleBigPlanet (PS3)
Left 4 Dead (PC)
Gears Of War 2 (X360)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft presents an overhaul of the Xbox 360 dashboard, which it dubs the New Xbox Experience. Nintendo announces Wii Motion Plus and Shigeru Miyamoto demonstrates *Wii Music*. Sony announces *God Of War III* for its PlayStation 3.

2009

KEY GAMES

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves (PS3)
Mass Effect 2 (X360/PC)
Modern Warfare 2 (PS3/X360/PC)
New Super Mario Bros Wii (Wii)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft announces Project Natal, later renamed Kinect. Sony reveals the PlayStation Move controllers. Ringo Starr and Paul McCartney take to the stage to showcase *The Beatles: Rock Band*.

2010

KEY GAMES

Portal 2 (PS3/X360/PC/Mac)
Dance Central (X360)
Disney's Epic Mickey (Wii)
Rage (PS3/X360/PC)

KEY REVEALS

Satoru Iwata unveils the 3DS, Nintendo's new 3D handheld. Gameplay from *The Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword* is shown. Ubisoft demonstrates *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Hideo Kojima presents a trailer for *Metal Gear Solid: Rising*, which becomes *Revengeance*.

2011

KEY GAMES

BioShock Infinite (PS3/X360/PC)
Batman: Arkham City (PS3/X360/PC)
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (PS3/X360/PC)
Tomb Raider (PS3/X360/PC)

KEY REVEALS

Sony demonstrates the PlayStation Vita. Nintendo introduces the Wii U. Microsoft unveils *Halo 4*. Sony gives a live demo of Naughty Dog's *Uncharted 3*.

says. "The swag back then was so awesome." Then again, the press conferences themselves tended to be less impressive. "They weren't quite the spectacle that they became," Thomas says. "People have to understand that the show initially mainly was for retail and buyers to see what they would sell during the year. So all the publishers had tons of meetings, boozy parties with buyers, and then they'd discuss how much product retailers would order in the mornings. That was the business then. Press was a bit secondary at that point." As such, conferences tended to be held in drab hotel conference rooms, and often featured dull PowerPoint presentations of sales projections and marketing outlay. The glitzy stages and amped-up performances would only come much later, when the conferences began to be streamed to the public.

"What is hard to convey now is that barely anyone knew what would be shown when you went to these conferences," says Thomas. "There were no leaks back then; information was so carefully controlled, the internet was not as prevalent. You'd go into a press briefing and have no idea what games or information would be revealed."

E3 returned to LA in 1999, and grew steadily over the next seven years. Although perhaps it grew a bit too much. "By 2006, E3 had become so packed, with so much noise, people and celebs, that the LA Convention Center was just too small," says Thomas, noting that getting to meetings through the throng of people was nigh-on impossible. At the same time, exhibitors were complaining about the steadily increasing cost of securing a booth at E3, along with the influx of attendees from outside the press and retail sectors. The ESA responded by downsizing E3 in 2007, limiting attendance to around 5,000 and ditching the LA Convention Center in favour of smaller press conferences held at hotels scattered across Santa Monica. The event returned to the Convention Center in 2008, but the restricted numbers were maintained, leaving the echoing halls feeling rather empty.

These rather muted two years were roundly criticised by attendees, and so E3 was revived to its old glitzy self in 2009 – although to alleviate the crush of some previous events, numbers were restricted to around 41,000. The show ticked along nicely for a few years, but 2013 saw the first sign of trouble when Nintendo decided to ditch an E3

Image credits: Pat Ferrell, Infotainment World (an IDG Company), Entertainment Software Association, Thomas Puha.

HOW DOES IT FEEL?

JOURNALISTS RECALL WHAT IT'S LIKE TO ATTEND E3

Nathan Brown sums up going to E3 as, "Like going to Disneyland, except you're staying in a roach motel and sharing a room with the editor of *Official Xbox Magazine*. But it really is a sort of pilgrimage for lovers of games, a rite of passage for videogame professionals, and it felt special in a way I unfortunately can't really articulate. Patrick Klepek described it recently as proof you've made it as a game journalist, or something like that, and that's bang on. It was the first time I really felt like I was established, rather than just cosplaying as a videogame journalist."

Patrick Klepek, senior reporter at Waypoint, first attended E3 at the age of 14, when he was writing for a website called Gamerz Online. "I made a whole host of lifelong friendships attending E3," he says, "and as its yearly occurrence became a staple in my life, I so desperately looked forward to those days in California, under the bright lights and cranked speakers, because it was an opportunity to be among people I was slowly coming to call both colleagues and friends. I had normal friendships back home, but this was an entirely different world – it was my world. That felt special.

"When I conjure E3 in my mind, much of what I remember is before the internet – and particularly streaming – took over. A new *Metal Gear Solid* trailer was such a huge event. They were long, sprawling cinematic events worth watching even if you didn't care about the *Metal Gear* series, and Konami would have hundreds of people camped out in front of its big projector, watching the trailers play. I doubt this was true early on, but eventually, Konami was posting a schedule for when the trailers would play, and you could tell when it was *Metal Gear* time, because people were nabbing spots on the ground like it was a summer concert. Remember, this is before fans were in the show, so it was press and retail people who decided, 'I would like to sit on the floor to watch this loud trailer for 15 minutes.' Incredible."

2012

KEY GAMES

The Last Of Us (PS3)
Dishonored (PS3/X360/PC)
Assassin's Creed III (PS3/X360/Wii U/PC)
Halo 4 (X360)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft announces Xbox SmartGlass. Ubisoft reveals a stunning trailer for *Watch Dogs*. Sony unveils Wonderbook, an augmented reality accessory for PS3. Nintendo showcases the Wii U launch titles, including *New Super Mario Bros U*.

2013

KEY GAMES

Titanfall (XO/X360/PC)
Destiny (PS3/PS4/X360/XO)
Watch Dogs (Various)
The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds (3DS)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft announces the Xbox One will be released in November at $499. Sony shows the PlayStation 4, which will launch at $399. Ubisoft unveils *The Crew* and *The Division*. Nintendo showcases trailers for *Pokémon X* and *Y*.

2014

KEY GAMES

Alien: Isolation (PC, Various)
Batman: Arkham Knight (PS4/XO/PC)
Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor (Various)
Splatoon (Wii U)

KEY REVEALS

Rockstar announces *Grand Theft Auto V*. Sony offers a first look at *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*. Nintendo announces a currently unnamed *Zelda* game for Wii U. The seamless trailer for *No Man's Sky* stuns audiences.

2015

KEY GAMES

Star Wars: Battlefront (PS4/XO/PC)
Fallout 4 (PS4/XO/PC)
Horizon: Zero Dawn (PS4)
Super Mario Maker (Wii U)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft announces backwards compatibility for Xbox One. Sony's presentation reveals *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, *Shenmue III* and *The Last Guardian*. EA reveals the first trailer for *Mass Effect: Andromeda*. Microsoft's Hololens blows people's minds.

2016

KEY GAMES

The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild (Wii U/Switch)
Dishonored 2 (PS4/XO/PC)
God Of War (PS4)
Battlefield 1 (PS4/XO/PC)

KEY REVEALS

Microsoft unveils the 4K Project Scorpio, due in 2017, and the slimline Xbox One S. Bethesda says it is working on *The Elder Scrolls VI*. Capcom reveals the first-person *Resident Evil 7*. Hideo Kojima shows the first trailer for *Death Stranding*.

2017

KEY GAMES

Marvel's Spider-Man (PS4)
Monster Hunter World (PS4/XO/PC)
Wolfenstein 2: The New Colossus (PS4/XO/PC)
Super Mario Odyssey (Switch)

KEY REVEALS

Nintendo and Ubisoft debut *Mario + Rabbids: Kingdom Battle*. BioWare showcases *Anthem*. Microsoft renames Project Scorpio as Xbox One X. Ubisoft drops a surprise trailer for *Beyond Good and Evil 2*.

social
music
tv
games

Image credits: Thomas Puha

» Thomas Puha's snap of Microsoft's press conference at E3 2011. Covering E3 as a games journalist was a frenetic business, he says. "The stress of trying to make it to all your meetings was crazy. You'd have ten to fourteen meetings a day, half-hour slots to see games. You'd have to trek across the LA Convention Center all day, and you'd be late half the time."

press conference in favour of a recorded video. "Looking back, that was the beginning of the end," says Nathan Brown, former editor of *Edge* magazine. "EA shuffled off to EA Play, Microsoft moved their conference from Monday to Sunday, and everything became a bit more stretched out as publishers and platform holders decided they wanted more control of the news cycle." Then the ESA began admitting general consumers in 2016. "The first year Joe Public was let through the doors was an absolute disaster," says Nathan. "There'd been no changes to floor layout to accommodate the greater numbers, and the first day was just this mad crush of people with no idea where they were going and no real agenda in any case. I was 40 minutes late for my first appointment and it was all downhill from there."

Sony's dramatic decision to ditch E3 2019 was a huge blow for the event, especially since the company was one of its strongest supporters at the start. Then the Coronavirus pandemic saw E3 being cancelled in 2020, and swapped for a digital event in 2021. The Coronavirus once again put paid to the chances of a physical show in 2022, but more worryingly, no digital alternative has been planned. Some are wondering whether E3 will ever return, and whether it's even needed in a time when internet presentations and trailers can reach millions of consumers without the need to pay for expensive booths in a crowded conference centre.

Perhaps that's true. But it's also downplaying the importance of trade shows like E3. "People always say, 'Oh, they're not important at all,' but yet they are," says Tom. E3 isn't just a chance for companies to build buzz around their products, it's also a chance to meet people, to do deals, to network, to make lasting human connections. Pat sums it up, "Being able to throw back a cocktail with somebody is a big deal." *

Ubisoft
SEGA

Image credits: Pat Ferrell and Infotainment World.

» *NiGHTS Into Dreams* was one of the big games at E3 1999.

PlayStation
TRIBES AERIAL ASSAULT
TRIBES AERIAL ASSAULT

Image credits: Guywelch2000

» *Tribes: Aerial Assault* was one of the first PS2 games designed for online play, and was announced at E3 at the same time as Sony's PS2 Network Adaptor.

FINAL FANTASY XIII
SQUARE ENIX
COMING 2010

» E3 2009: The sheer din of E3 is legendary. "You'd have concerts right on the show floor in the early years!" says Thomas Puha. "The noise was crazy. You'd be in a meeting next door and couldn't hear anything the presenter said."

2018

KEY GAMES

Fallout 76 (PS4/XO/PC)
Super Smash Bros Ultimate (Switch)
Doom Eternal (PS4/XO/PC)
Resident Evil 2 (PS4/XO/PC)

KEY REVEALS

Sony showcases *The Last Of Us Part II*. Bethesda reveals *Starfield* with a name and little else. CD Projekt RED drops a cinematic trailer for *Cyberpunk 2077*, and shows gameplay footage behind closed doors. Microsoft announces *Halo Infinite*.

2019

KEY GAMES

Halo Infinite (XS/PC)
Watch Dogs Legion (Various)
Final Fantasy VII Remake (PS4/PS5/PC)
Cyberpunk 2077 (Various)

KEY REVEALS

Keanu Reeves makes a surprise appearance to say he'll feature in *Cyberpunk 2077*. Crystal Dynamics reveals a divisive trailer for *Marvel's Avengers*. Microsoft teases Project Scarlett, the successor to Xbox One.

2021

KEY GAMES

Starfield (XS/PC)
Battlefield 2042 (Various)
Mario + Rabbids: Sparks Of Hope (Switch)
Forza Horizon 5 (XO/XS/PC)

KEY REVEALS

The first gameplay trailer for *Elden Ring* is revealed. The *Breath Of The Wild* sequel gets a release window and new trailer. Square reveals *Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy*. Nintendo announces *Metroid Dread*.

» E3 2017: Massive crowds are a perennial fixture of the show. The queues for food at E3 would usually be enormous, and the food itself was often disappointing, says Thomas Puha. "So you had to learn which publishers had catering and try to have meetings with them around lunch hour, so maybe you could grab a bite," he notes.

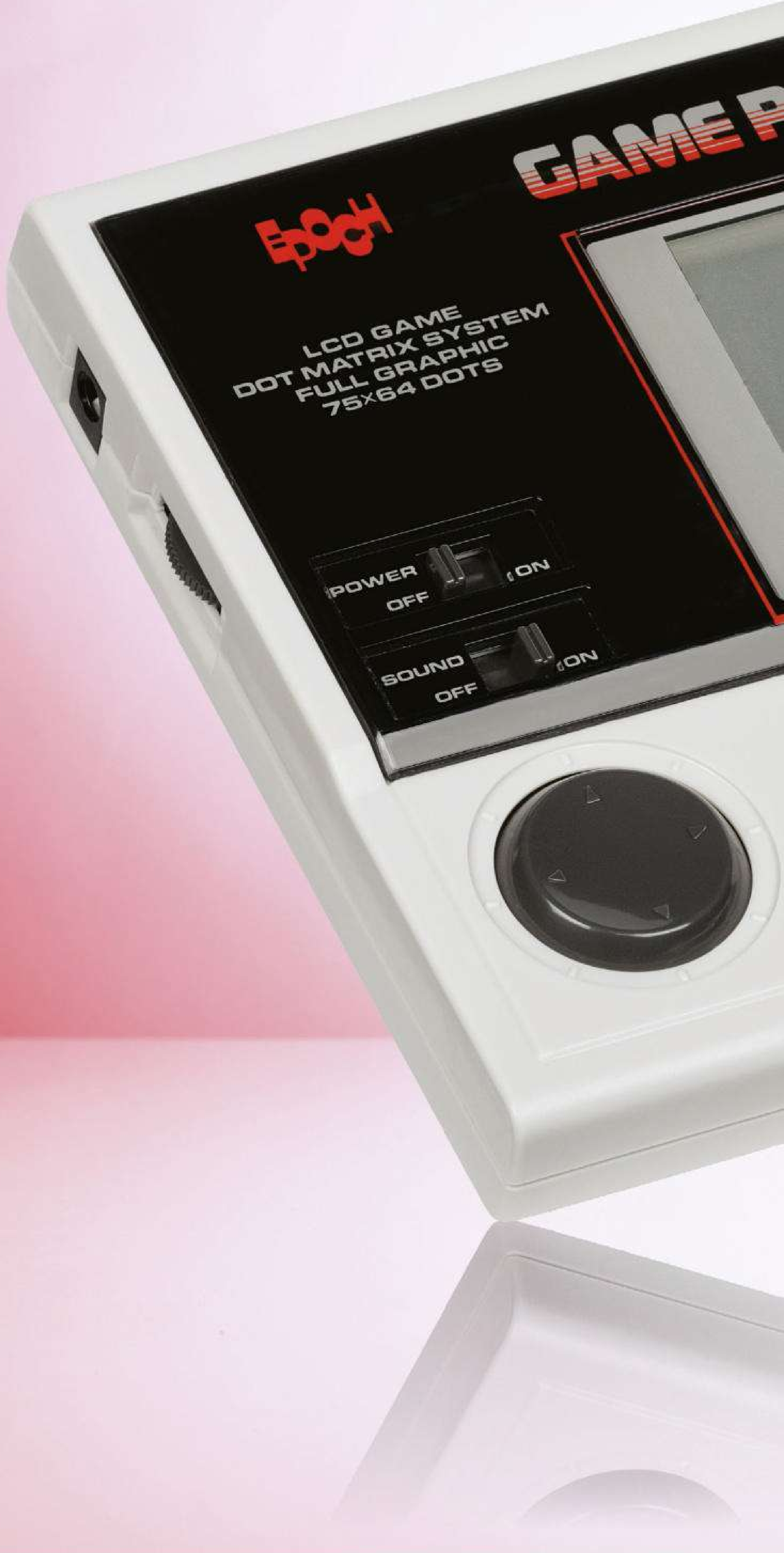
Hardware Heaven

Game Pocket Computer

» **MANUFACTURER:** Epoch » **YEAR:** 1984
» **COST:** ¥12,000 (launch), £120+ (today, boxed), £60+ (today, unboxed)

After achieving initial success in the home gaming market with *Pong* consoles and the Cassette Vision, Epoch decided to branch out into a largely unexplored area of gaming with the Game Pocket Computer, a somewhat bulky handheld console which sported a similar look to the company's Super Cassette Vision home console. Though its design is largely unremarkable, the system features a window through which the label of the game cartridge can be read, and includes a graphics tool and a simple puzzle game as part of the system software.

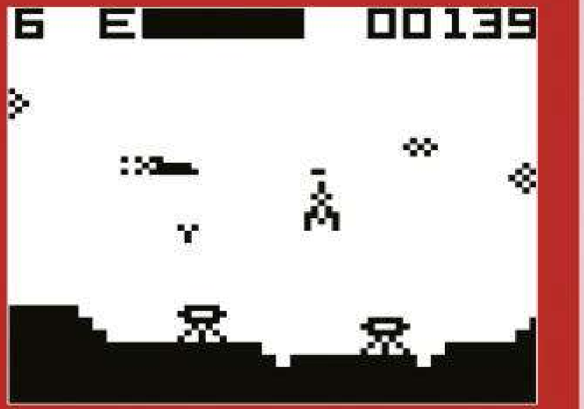
The Game Pocket Computer was a capable little machine for its day, and accordingly launched at a fairly high price – just a few thousand yen less than the home consoles of the era. The console was not at all successful, and as a result only five games were released for Epoch's system – *Astro Bomber, Block Maze, Mahjong, Reversi* and *Sokoban*. Those with the means to use Japanese auction sites should therefore find that it's very feasible to pick up a complete collection, though it will inevitably require patience and a deep wallet. *



ESSENTIAL GAME

Astro Bomber

All five of the Game Pocket Computer's officially released games are fairly basic versions of well-known game templates, and three of them are puzzle games. If you're looking for something with a bit of action, the system's only shoot-'em-up is a better choice than *Block Maze*. *Astro Bomber* is effectively a clone of Konami's arcade hit *Scramble*, and sees you shooting down airborne targets and bombing missile and fuel silos. While it's not an original concept, it's a well-executed version of an arcade favourite and that's always welcome.



POCKET COMPUTER
GAME CASSETTE
SELECT
START

Game Pocket Computer fact

- Epoch would experience much greater success in the Nineties with a less traditional handheld gaming device – the infamous Barcode Battler.

PROCESSORS: 8-BIT NEC MPD78C06 (6MHZ)
GRAPHICS: 75X64 BLACK AND WHITE LCD
MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 16KB)
AUDIO: ONE CHANNEL BEEPER
SYSTEM SOFTWARE: 4KB ROM
RAM: 2KB RAM

DOT MATRIX LCD GAME
FULL GRAPHIC SYSTEM
75×64 DOTS
EPOCH
ON
OFF
SOUND
ON
OFF
POWER

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ULTIMATE GUIDE

TYPHOON

KONAMI
エー・ジャックス
AJAX
© KONAMI 1987
VRAM回転・拡大・縮少機能搭載!!
迫真の2D STAGE 3D STAGE シューティング。
大好評
THE HUSTLER
ザ・ハスラー
超リアル、ビリヤードシミュレーション
City Bomber
乞ご期待
ロングセラーの決定版
コナミのピカデリーシリーズ
ピカデリー グラディウス
ピカデリー RF2
コナミ株式会社

» Ocean converted the game to the Commodore 64, Spectrum and Amstrad CPC. No 16-bit versions were considered.

IF YOU WERE PITCHING KONAMI'S TYPHOON TO SOMEONE IN AN ELEVATOR YOU'D SAY IT WAS TWIN COBRA MEETS AFTER BURNER. READ ON TO DISCOVER HOW THIS ARCADE MASHUP WORKED AND WHY IT'S STILL A REAL BLAST TO PLAY 35 YEARS LATER

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

Konami was the king of arcade shooters in the Eighties, with *Scramble* and *Gradius* (*Nemesis*) establishing the framework that other followers. Of course we're talking about side-scrolling shooters here. When it came to vertical shooters Konami did dabble – see *Mega Zone* and *Twinbee* – but the vertical-scrolling shooter was the domain of developers like Capcom, Tecmo and Toaplan. Indeed, in 1987, when Konami was developing *Typhoon*, the arcades were already home to *Flying Shark*, *1943*, *Gemini Wing* and *Twin Cobra*. Sega was also readying a new vertical shooter called *Sonic Boom*. For *Typhoon* to stand out from the crowd it would take something quite special.

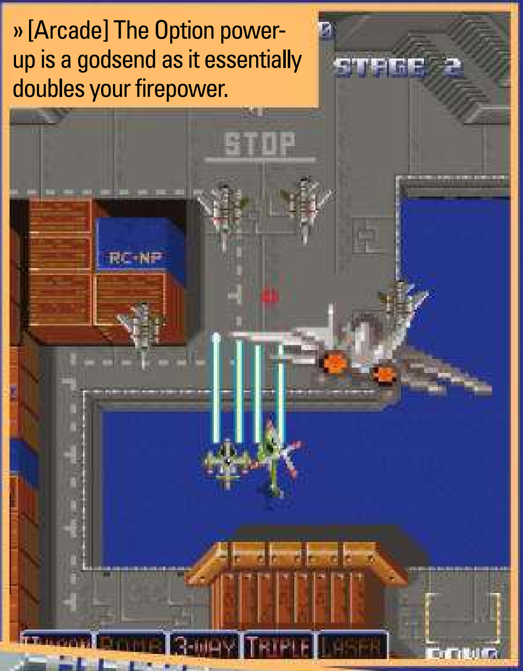
Konami's answer was to marry 2D and 3D shooters. *Typhoon* featured traditional 2D stages in which you piloted a helicopter against waves of enemy forces, and these were interspersed with into-the-screen 3D stages where you took control of a fighter jet. It's perhaps unsurprising that the game's producer (Koji Hiroshita) and director (Satoru Okamoto) had both previously worked on *Contra*, another game that mixed playing perspectives.

Typhoon's 2D style was dominant, occupying five of the game's eight stages and containing the key gameplay elements. As was the norm, you started out with a feeble peashooter but by collecting power-ups you could switch to four more powerful weapons. Screen-clearing smart bombs were also featured and so were air-to-ground missiles (think *Xevious*, only these missiles could be upgraded – *twice*). Konami also borrowed the Option weapon from its own *Gradius*. Collect one of these and a small helicopter would shadow your own and double your firepower. This upgraded weaponry was almost mandatory as the odds were overwhelmingly against you, with boats, tanks, planes and choppers all trying to take you down. Even the damn clouds fire at you!

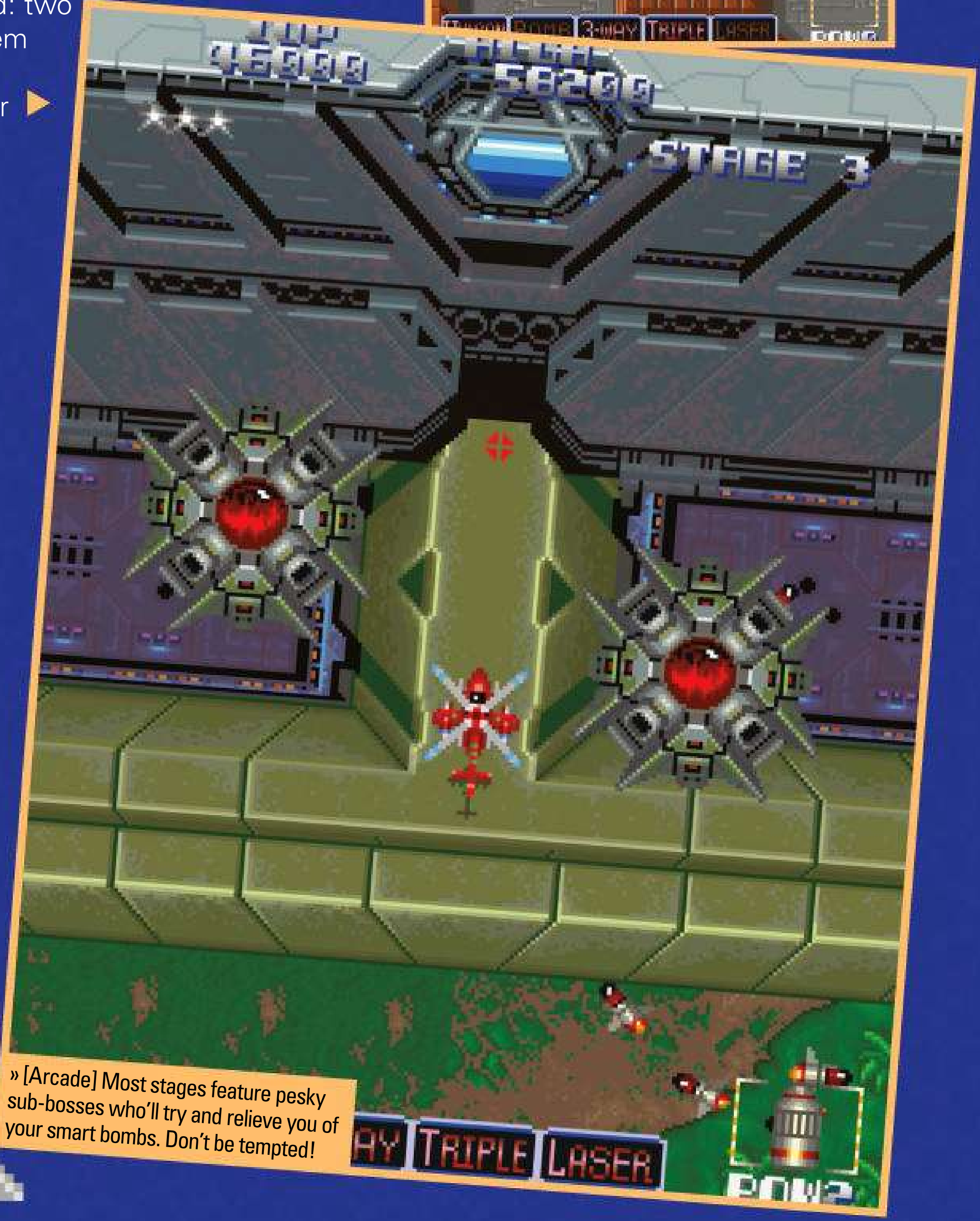
> "SCREEN-CLEARING SMART BOMBS WERE ALSO FEATURED AND SO WERE AIR-TO-GROUND MISSILES"

The 3D stages were far easier and played like interstitial scenes designed to provide variation and visual flourish. Your jet's loadout was limited to just guns and missiles, and it was more a case of avoiding enemies than actively trying to destroy them. The graphics weren't up to *After Burner* standards, and the vertical alignment limited the impact to some extent, but it was still a fairly wild ride. In particular each 3D stage ended with a climactic battle against an enemy megastructure.

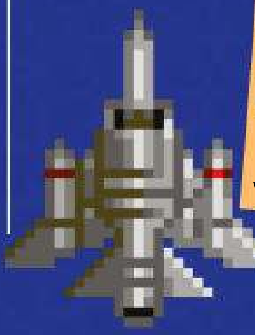
The hardware required to facilitate the two different game styles was clearly impressive. The CPU was not the usual 68000, as you might expect, but a modified 6809 (that's right, the same CPU as the dear old Dragon 32). But as with most Konami hardware, the grunt came from custom graphics chips and there were three used: two worked in tandem to generate the massive number ▶

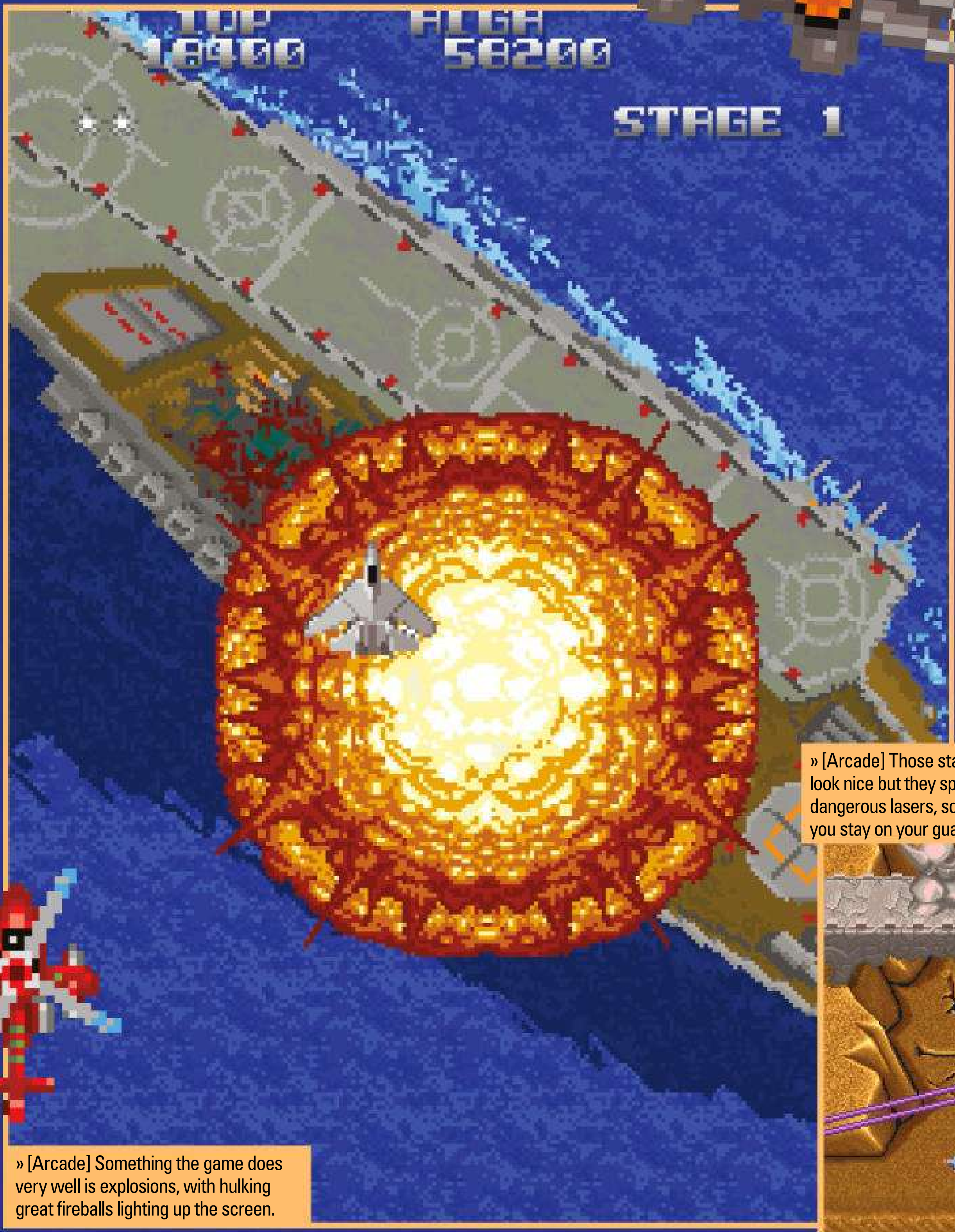


» [Arcade] The Option power-up is a godsend as it essentially doubles your firepower.



» [Arcade] Most stages feature pesky sub-bosses who'll try and relieve you of your smart bombs. Don't be tempted!





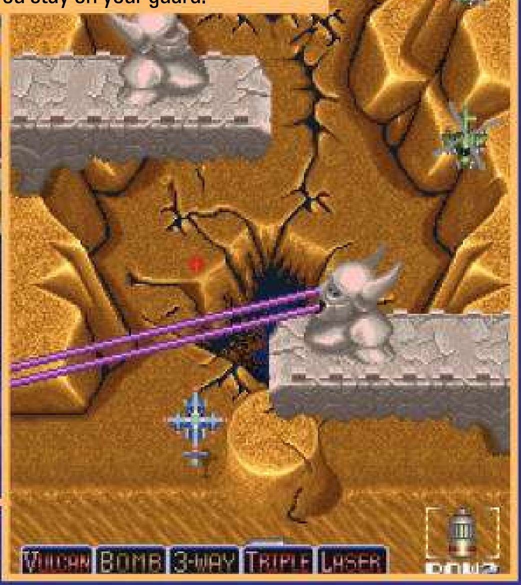
» [Arcade] Something the game does very well is explosions, with hulking great fireballs lighting up the screen.

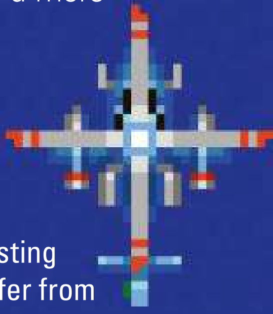
▶ of sprites displayed on-screen while the third manipulated the tilemap, enabling it to be zoomed, distorted and rotated. It was these 'extra' capabilities that brought the 3D stages to life and produced impressive sequences like the climax to the first stage when the aircraft carrier looms and spirals into view. Some zooming effects were also used in the 2D scenes, albeit more subtly, to show bosses rising up to face you and enemy planes crashing down to the ground.

The game debuted in Japan in December 1987 under its original title *Ajax.* It retained this title in North America, but it was renamed *Typhoon* internationally (presumably to avoid confusion with mythological heroes, football clubs and cleaning products). EMAP sent *Commodore User* deputy editor Mike Pattenden over to the 1987 JAMMA show in Tokyo and *Ajax* was one of the games he previewed. "It plays like *Terra Cresta* and wouldn't have made much of an impression had it not transformed into a 3D fighter game," he reported. "This makes the game much more interesting. Give it a whirl when it arrives."

With so many 2D shooters around at the time, it's hardly surprising that it was the 3D stages that grabbed the attention. Konami perhaps sensed this, because for *Typhoon* it shuffled the stage order so that the first 3D stage, which was originally the second stage in *Ajax*, was bumped up to stage one. This move made sense as it rewarded players with a dazzling opening before settling into a more

» [Arcade] Those statues might look nice but they spew out dangerous lasers, so make sure you stay on your guard.





CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH HOME VERSIONS WERE CLOSEST TO THE COIN-OP?

COMMODORE 64

■ This commendable conversion packs in all of the bosses and levels from the coin-op, making it the most complete 8-bit version. The playing area is small (compared to shooters like *Terra Cresta*) but it runs quickly and the 3D sections work well.

ZX SPECTRUM

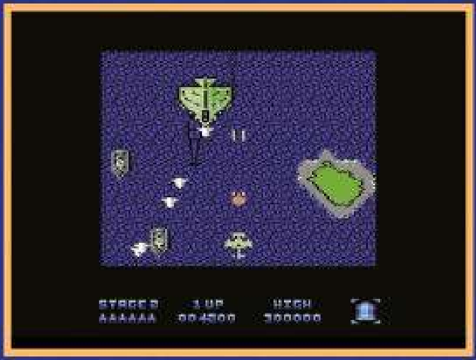
■ A so-so conversion where the drab graphics make a difficult game even more demanding as to try to decipher enemy fire. Most boss battles are curtailed or skipped entirely. One for lenient shooter fans. *Sinclair User* awarded this 72% which says it all.

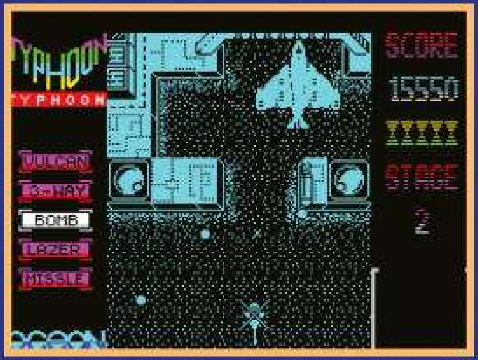
AMSTRAD CPC

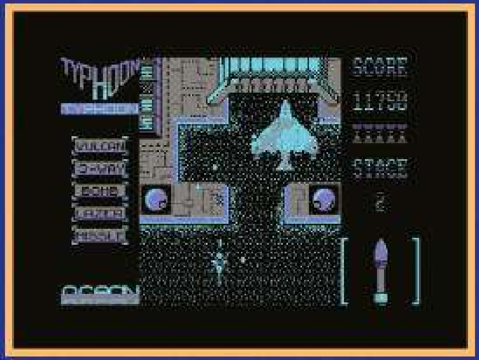
■ A poor Spectrum port. What it gives with one hand (there's more on-screen colour, making it easier to play) it snatches back with the other (it's slower and it's missing three whole stages compared to the Speccy's two absentees).

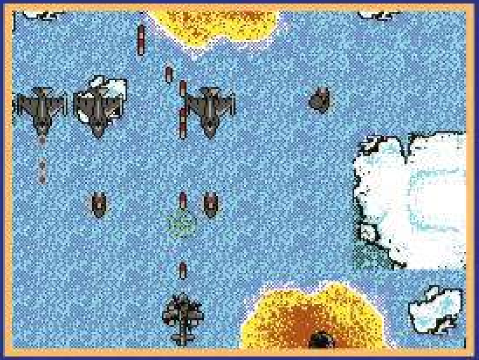
PC

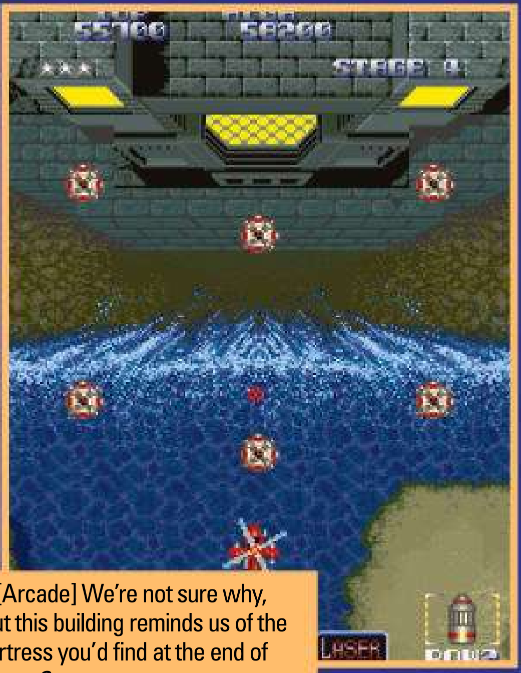
■ This is, let's say, an interesting version. The 3D sections suffer from small sprites, but the 2D stages are fine – if you can look past the gaudy EGA colours. Content-wise it's mostly there, just missing the second and third 3D sections (a small mercy).











» [Arcade] We're not sure why, but this building reminds us of the fortress you'd find at the end of many *Contra* stages.

regular groove. When *Typhoon* arrived in the UK in early 1988 it was well-received by Ciaran Brennan of *Your Sinclair*. "Most flying games are going to be a bit of a let-down after *After Burner*, but this provides quite a challenge in its own way," he wrote. "And at 20p [a credit] it's a good deal cheaper than Sega's sit-down extravaganza." That's right, thrifty gamers could get five whole goes on *Typhoon* compared to just one on *After Burner*. Ciaran gave the game a 'convertability factor' of 4/10, meaning that any home version would be a challenge. "A lot to fit into the poor little Spectrum," he added.

That didn't deter Ocean who wasted little time in converting the game to the Spectrum along with the Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64. Ocean had a long-running relationship with Konami stretching back to the *Green Beret* and *Mikie* days, so it would have been more of a surprise if it hadn't converted the game. *Typhoon* was released on the Imagine label in autumn 1988 and later appeared

> "WITH SO MANY 2D SHOOTERS AROUND AT THE TIME, IT'S HARDLY SURPRISING THAT IT WAS THE 3D STAGES THAT GRABBED THE ATTENTION"

DEVELOPER Q&A

ANDREW SLEIGH PRODUCED THE GRAPHICS FOR THE COMMODORE 64 VERSION

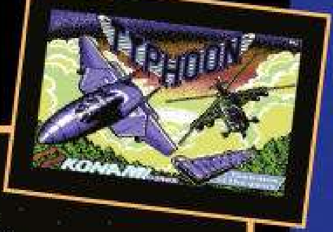
You worked on several arcade conversions for Ocean. Where does *Typhoon* rank in your memories?
Well I just had to watch a YouTube video to jog my memory! I remember doing the loading screen and some of the graphics of course, but I'd forgotten about all of the different levels.

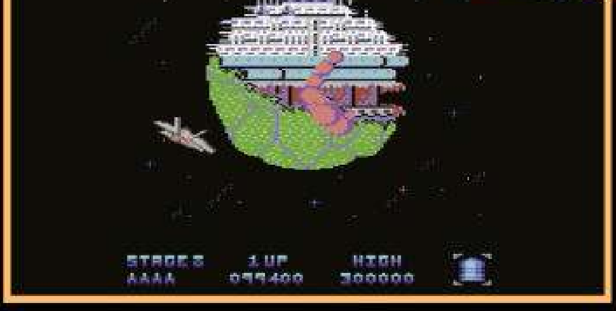
Did you have access to the original arcade game?
Yes, the board was wired up in the famous 'arcade alley' at Ocean. We usually had three months to do each game, so for arcade conversions I'd spend a week playing through the game from start to finish, obviously with all the cheats switched on. And for reference I'd video myself playing it with an actual video camera on a tripod. Then I'd go away and plan it out, thinking about how long each level needed to be and what graphics would be required. I'd define characters for the water, the grass and so on, and create little chunks that I could then repeat 50 times. I just got my head down and did it.

And the loading screen was based on the arcade's title screen?
It was. That's one of those screens where I now think, "Did I actually do that?" That plane looks so good, but obviously I must have had half an hour to finish off the background. I probably spent four days doing the plane and the helicopter, and then someone was like, "We need that for tomorrow!" So I had to quickly fill in the background.

Did the 3D sections cause any issues?
For the opening bit the clouds were just eight or so static screens that were shown in sequence to give the impression of movement. I also had to draw the enemy jets at different sizes, so it looked like they were approaching. I think it works well.

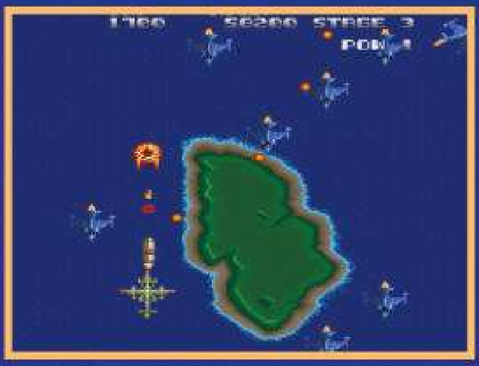
One criticism of the conversion is that the actual playing area is quite small.
Well yeah, we were scrolling the entire screen so it was a compromise to get that extra little bit of speed. Speed was everything with conversions, they had to be fast. I worked with Zach [Townsend] on most of my games at Ocean and he was always coding pretty close to the machine's limit.





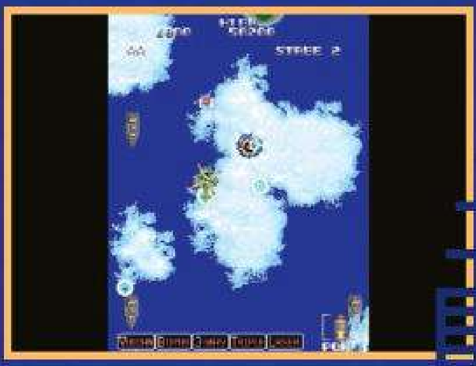
SHARP X68000

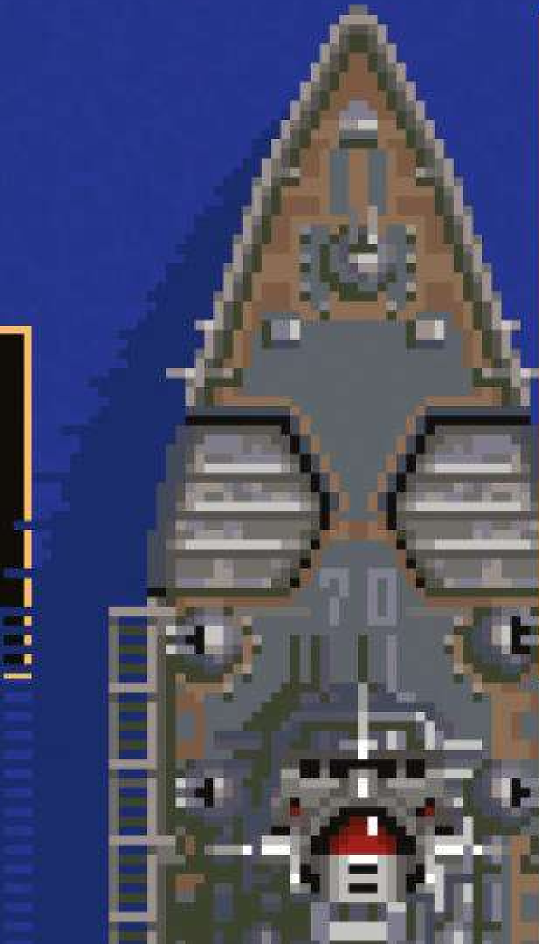
■ This is the most faithful conversion, with all of the content included. There's just one oddity – in the 2D stages, if you pull back against the bottom of the screen the game scrolls backwards! This completely changes the gameplay – and not for the better.

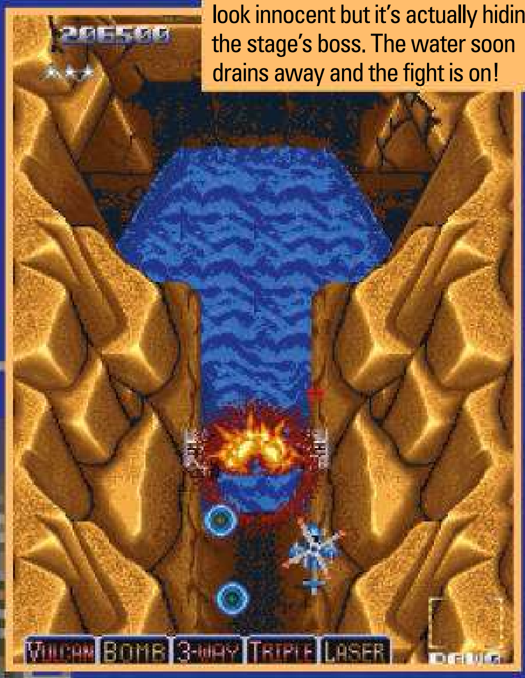


SWITCH/PS4/XBOX/PC

■ Released as both a standalone *Arcade Archives* title, and as part of the *Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection* in 2019, this is an arcade perfect conversion that's complimented by a bunch of gameplay and display options.






VULCAN BOMB 3-WAY TRIPLE LASER

» [Arcade] This dam of water may look innocent but it's actually hiding the stage's boss. The water soon drains away and the fight is on!

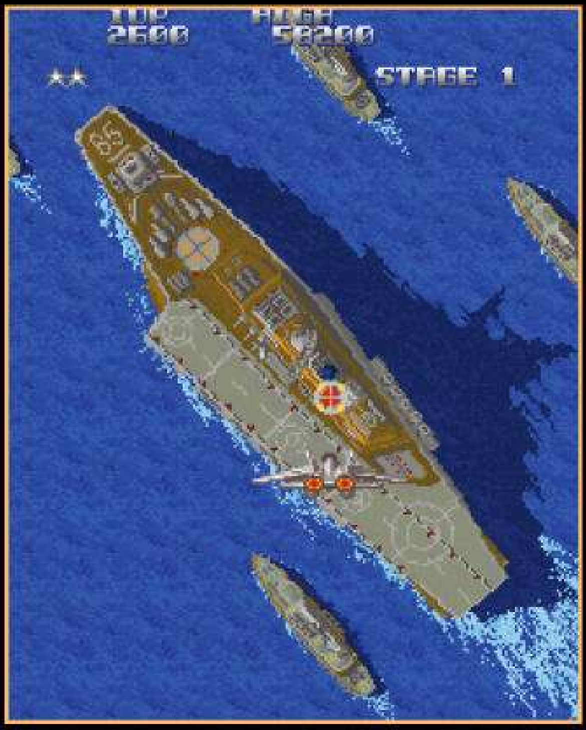
BOSS RUSH

HOW TO DEFEAT THE HATEFUL EIGHT BOSSES

STAGE 01

■ As you approach the water this large aircraft carrier spins into view, along with several support ships. The main carrier will launch a salvo of missiles in your direction.

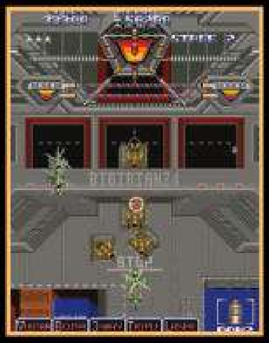
HOW TO BEAT IT: The first boss is predictably the easiest to beat. Just aim your fire at the orb in the centre of the carrier that glows orange then blue. Keep moving to avoid the missiles being fired at you.



STAGE 02

■ Having navigated the docks you'll arrive at this foreboding gun-wall that fires deadly orbs at you (which split into small orbs when hit). Regular enemies will also attack.

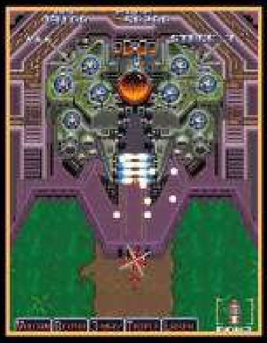
HOW TO BEAT IT: The central target must be destroyed, but it is protected by an impenetrable force field. To disable this you must first destroy the flashing targets to the left and right of it.



STAGE 03

■ This alien ship briefly opens up to reveal its core – its weak spot. However, when it does it fires off three large plasma shots that can be tricky to avoid.

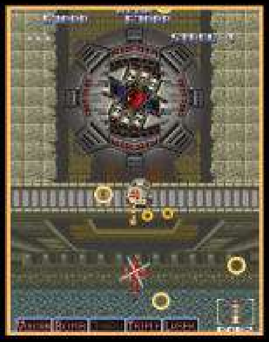
HOW TO BEAT IT: As soon as it opens up, focus all of your fire on the core, but get ready to swerve the incoming plasma shots. Do not be tempted to use a smart bomb as this boss is fairly easy to defeat.



STAGE 04

■ This metallic menace spins clockwise then anti-clockwise, spewing energy rings that radiate outwards. Turrets also appear on the conveyor belt.

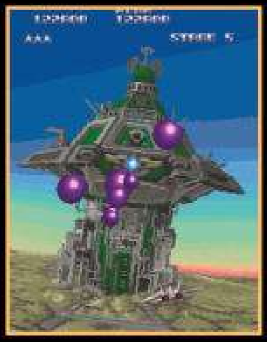
HOW TO BEAT IT: Although it appears to have a core, you just need to hit it anywhere on the spinning section. Only use a smart bomb if your weapons are underpowered.



STAGE 05

■ Another '3D' boss battle. This fortified tower fires purple blobs of doom that lock onto your position. You need to destroy it before you impact onto its surface.

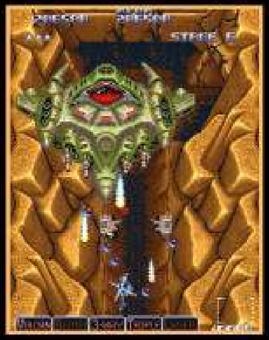
HOW TO BEAT IT: Move around the screen in an anti-clockwise direction to dodge the blobs while targeting the glowing orb at its centre with your guns (missiles are useless here).



STAGE 06

■ When you destroy the dam the boss will zoom up to greet you and unleash an absolute barrage of shots. A ridiculous bullet-hell scenario then unfolds so keep your wits about you.

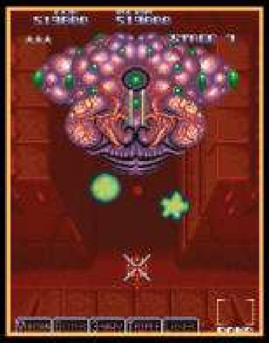
HOW TO BEAT IT: Start by targeting its four turrets to reduce its firepower. Then it's just a case of weaving through its shots. Smart bombs are very useful here so make sure you use them if you have them.



STAGE 07

■ This appears to be an easy *Gradius*-style 'core' boss, but it quickly transforms into a nasty gas-emitting alien-queen bug thing that's difficult to splat.

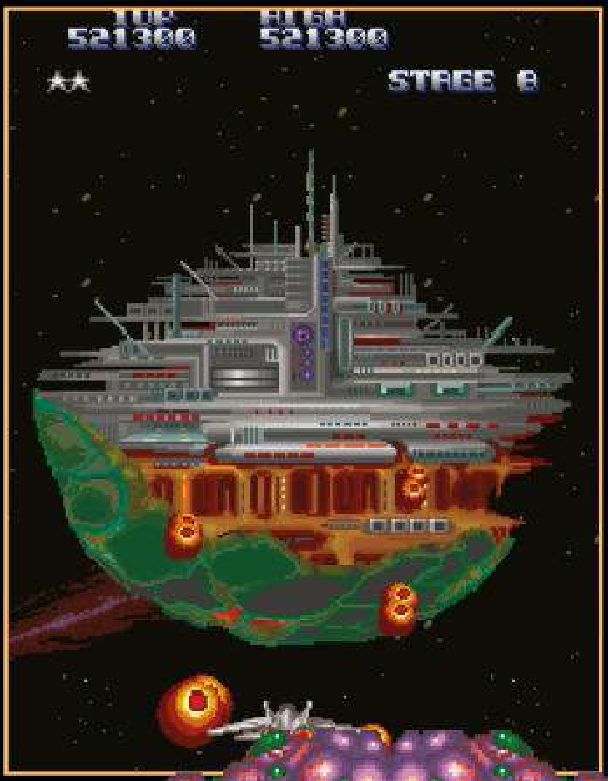
HOW TO BEAT IT: You can actually shoot the gas in order to clear a path, but its other projectiles are invincible so be careful. If you have any smart bombs left then this is the time to use them.

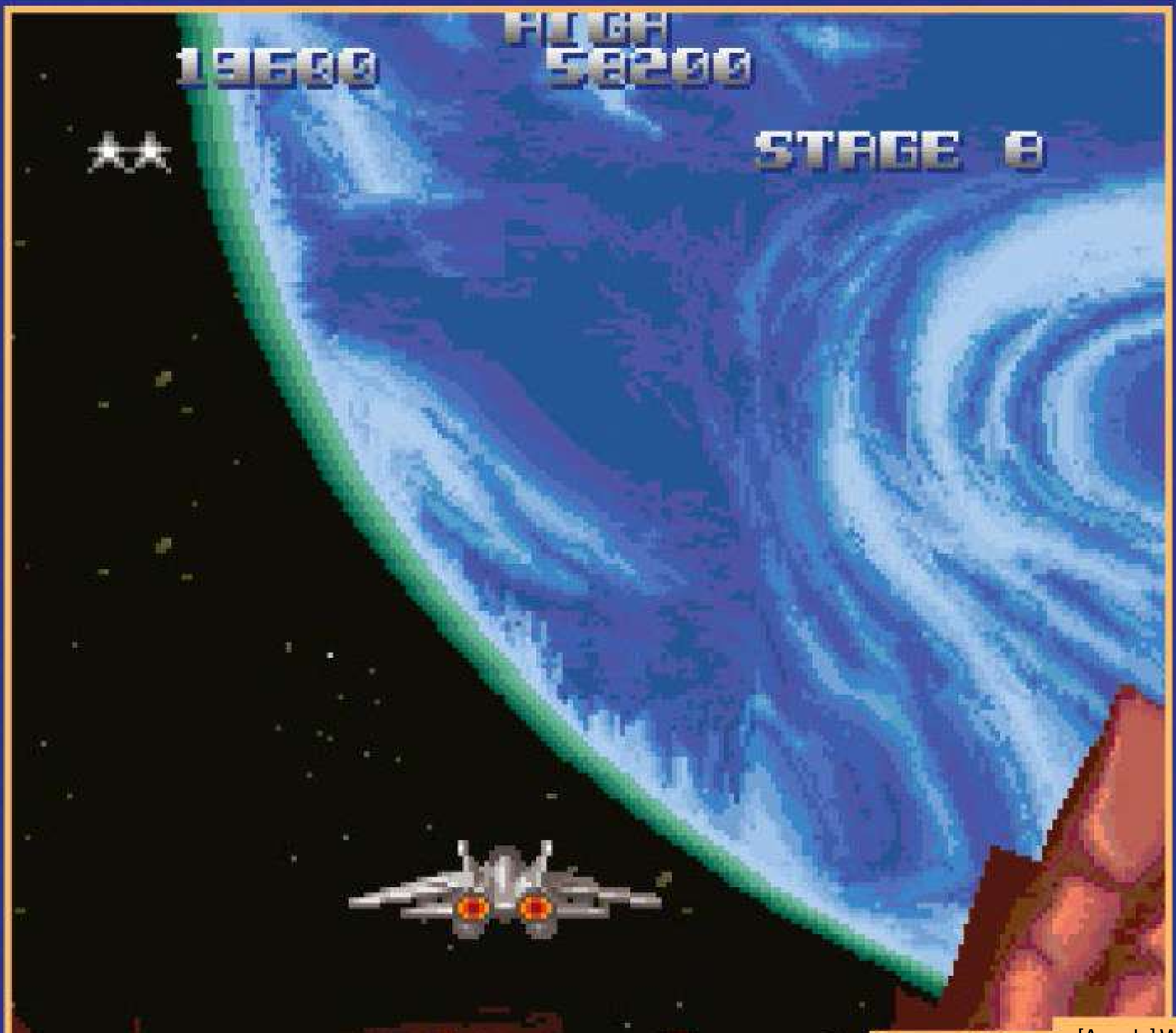


STAGE 08

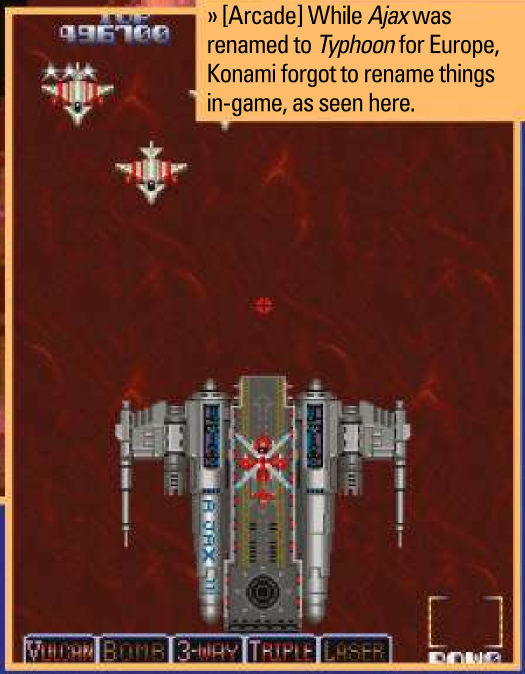
■ Reminiscent of the second Death Star, this space station tries you thwart your advance with relentless fireballs that actively target your jet.

HOW TO BEAT IT: As with the earlier '3D' bosses, keep moving to avoid its fire while you concentrate your own fire on its core. A few direct shots and it goes boom. Congratulations, you're a *Typhoon* pro!





» [Arcade] The sections where you fly into the screen remain impressive, but caused headaches for many home conversions.



» [Arcade] While *Ajax* was renamed to *Typhoon* for Europe, Konami forgot to rename things in-game, as seen here.

▶ on the *Battle Stations* compilation where in terms of quality it occupied the middle ground between the excellent *Operation Wolf* and the awful *Guerrilla War*.

Two further computer versions followed in 1989, for the PC and the Sharp X68000. Both of these attempted to introduce a vague plot. The former stated that your mission was to infiltrate and destroy an alien fortress, while the latter revealed that in the far-off future (2007!) aliens had arrived and kidnapped earthlings, "People in the sky are in all-out war… the hostages are alive… we have a lot of work to do!" Perhaps it's better that shooters don't have plots after all.

When it comes to the conversions the biggest surprise is that Konami did not adapt it for the NES or MSX, as it did with most of its arcade games of the era. The suggestion is that it was deemed too difficult to faithfully recreate on those machines. You can imagine it would have worked well on the SNES, thanks to its Mode 7 graphics, but it wasn't to be. The game was also absent from the many retro collections Konami put out over the years – although the *Ajax* jet was included as an unlockable bonus in Konami's *Airforce Delta* (*Deadly Skies*) flight sim series on Xbox and PlayStation 2.

Typhoon finally arrived on a console in 2015 when it was released on the PlayStation 4 as part of Hamster's *Arcade Archives* series. In 2019 it received a wider release on various home systems as part of the eight-game *Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection*. Some have questioned whether *Typhoon* really deserved inclusion alongside genre classics like *Scramble* and *Nemesis*, but it serves as a nice reminder of the time when Konami upped the ante in a bid to retain its king of shooters crown. ✱

> **"AS WITH MOST KONAMI HARDWARE, THE GRUNT CAME FROM CUSTOM GRAPHICS CHIPS AND THERE WERE THREE ON-BOARD"**

ARCADE CLASSICS COLLECTED

THANKS A BUNDLE, KONAMI

■ To celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2019, Konami released a trio of retro game collections for consoles and Steam. One was dedicated to *Contra*, another to *Castlevania*, and the third featured eight of its coin-op hits. *Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection* was almost entirely made up of shooters (*Castlevania* spin-off *Haunted Castle* was the odd one out) and included classics like *Scramble*, *Nemesis*, *Salamander* and *Thunder Cross*. *Vulcan Venture*, *Twinbee* and *Typhoon* were also included, and supplementary content included developer interviews and design documents.

The collection was reviewed in **RG** 194 where we awarded it 70%. Our chief criticism was what was missing – no Tate mode on the Switch for the three vertically-aligned games, and no way to change to the original Japanese versions (so you couldn't play *Ajax* with its different stage order, for example). To its credit, Konami addressed these issues and quickly released a free patch that added in Tate mode (making this the best way to play *Typhoon*, particularly if you've got a Flip Grip). This was followed by another patch which provided the option to toggle between the Japanese and international versions, plus some bug fixes. As a result the collection is now highly recommended. Here's hoping that it receives a physical release in the future. [Limited Run has released the *Contra* and *Castlevania* collections, so fingers crossed – Ed]

ANNIVERSARY
COLLECTION
ARCADE
CLASSICS

MOON
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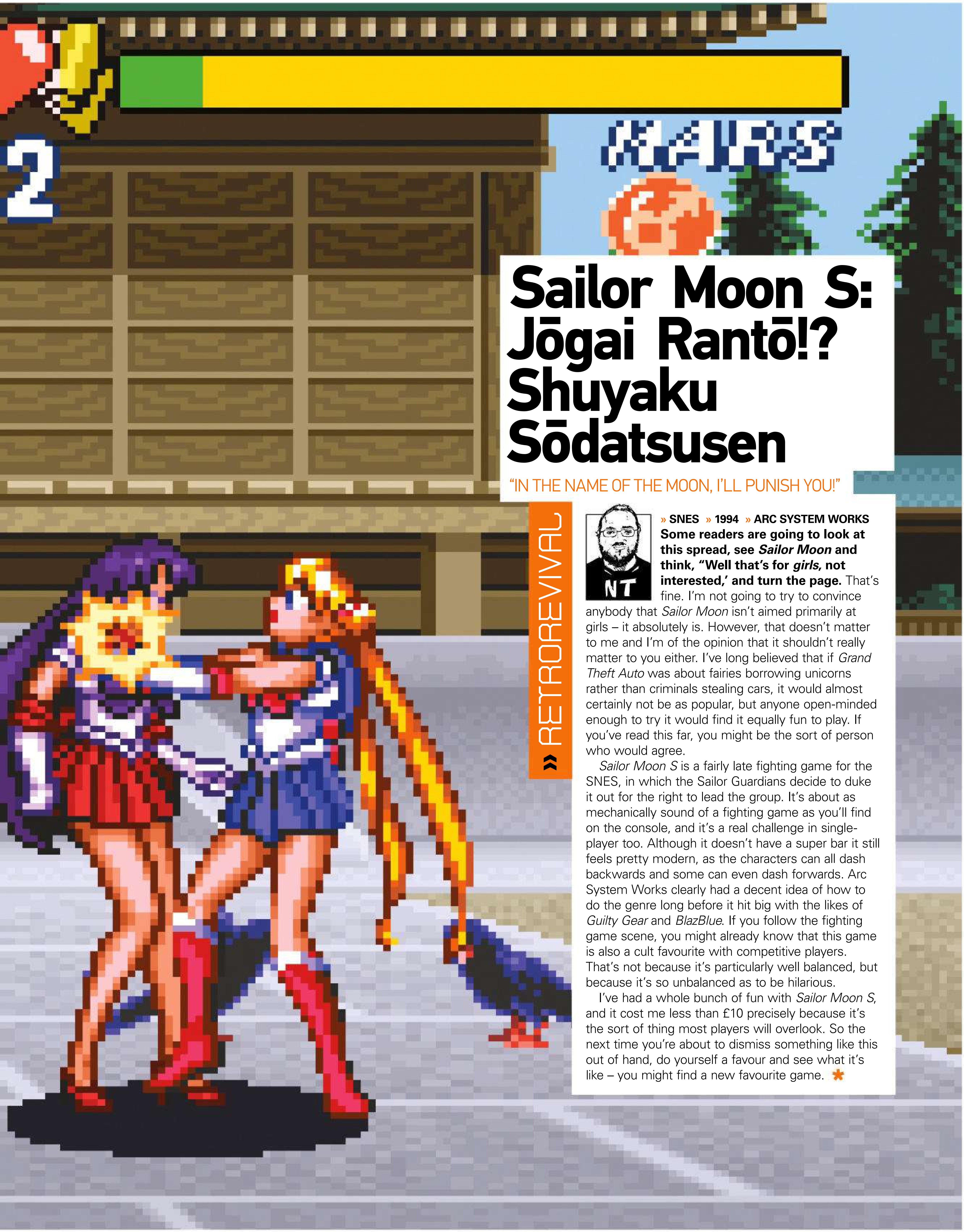


Sailor Moon S: Jōgai Rantō!? Shuyaku Sōdatsusen

"IN THE NAME OF THE MOON, I'LL PUNISH YOU!"

» SNES » 1994 » ARC SYSTEM WORKS

Some readers are going to look at this spread, see *Sailor Moon* and think, "Well that's for *girls*, not interested,' and turn the page. That's fine. I'm not going to try to convince anybody that *Sailor Moon* isn't aimed primarily at girls – it absolutely is. However, that doesn't matter to me and I'm of the opinion that it shouldn't really matter to you either. I've long believed that if *Grand Theft Auto* was about fairies borrowing unicorns rather than criminals stealing cars, it would almost certainly not be as popular, but anyone open-minded enough to try it would find it equally fun to play. If you've read this far, you might be the sort of person who would agree.

Sailor Moon S is a fairly late fighting game for the SNES, in which the Sailor Guardians decide to duke it out for the right to lead the group. It's about as mechanically sound of a fighting game as you'll find on the console, and it's a real challenge in single-player too. Although it doesn't have a super bar it still feels pretty modern, as the characters can all dash backwards and some can even dash forwards. Arc System Works clearly had a decent idea of how to do the genre long before it hit big with the likes of *Guilty Gear* and *BlazBlue*. If you follow the fighting game scene, you might already know that this game is also a cult favourite with competitive players. That's not because it's particularly well balanced, but because it's so unbalanced as to be hilarious.

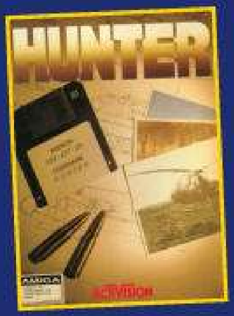
I've had a whole bunch of fun with *Sailor Moon S*, and it cost me less than £10 precisely because it's the sort of thing most players will overlook. So the next time you're about to dismiss something like this out of hand, do yourself a favour and see what it's like – you might find a new favourite game. ✱

THE MAKING OF

HUNTER

WITH EXPANSIVE MAPS TO EXPLORE AND VARIOUS WEAPONS, VEHICLES AND GAMEPLAY STYLES IN ITS ARSENAL, HUNTER WAS AHEAD OF THE OPEN-WORLD GAME PACK. WE REPORT BACK TO BASE WITH FRESH INTEL ABOUT HOW THE PIONEERING ACTION ADVENTURE CAME TOGETHER

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY



IN THE KNOW

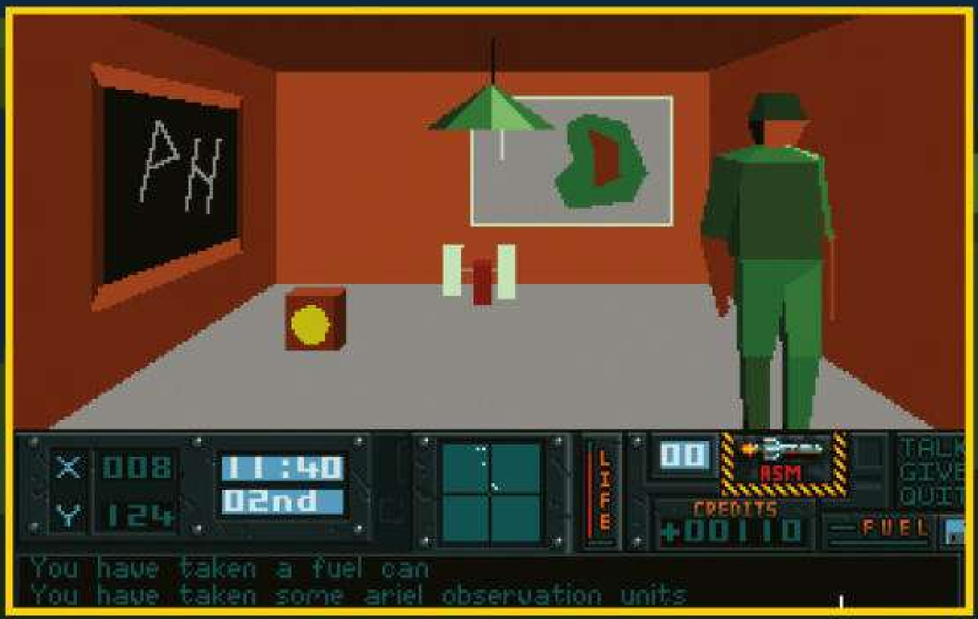
- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DEVELOPER:** PAUL HOLMES
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, ATARI ST
- » **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

Swimming across shark-infested waters under the cover of night, you reach the shores of an enemy outpost. Commandeering a helicopter, you rise into the darkness and begin scattering bombs onto their satellite dishes. But then disaster strikes – a nearby gun turret has locked on. Swerving to avoid a barrage of homing missiles, you realise there's no way out. Your new ride is going down in a ball of flames. Fortunately, the parachute you brought from the store earlier is still in your inventory. Sailing to safety as the chopper explodes, you slink into the shadows to die another day.

Such survival stories emerge readily on each new playthrough of *Hunter*. Released in 1991, it was preceded by many other videogames that gave players the freedom to explore large virtual worlds on their own terms, from *Adventure* to *Elite* and *Zelda*. But with fully 3D, third-person perspective graphics and mission-based gameplay, *Hunter* held its head high as a flag-bearer for a particular style of sandbox adventuring that would eventually become ubiquitous. Decades later, the game would draw comparisons with *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Just Cause* among other free-roaming modern action titles. This achievement is made even more remarkable considering that the game design was entirely the work of a lone developer.

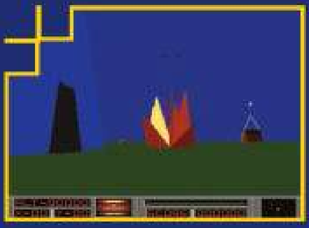
Paul Holmes became involved in computer programming thanks to a fortuitous piece of false advertising. Keen just to play games, he bought a machine being sold as a Commodore 64. On arriving home, he realised it was a Commodore Plus/4 – but disappointment turned into opportunity. "Fortunately, the Plus/4 had a built-in machine code monitor," he told us. "You could hack games to increase lives or write your own code, which I did, thereby learning machine

» Martin Walker is a prolific videogame composer and sound designer.



You have taken a fuel can
You have taken some ariel observation units

» [Amiga] Looting buildings will earn you weapons, fuel, gadgets and credits to spend at the store.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SIEGE ON LONDON (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA (UNPUBLISHED)
YEAR: 1988

SCORPION
SYSTEM: AMIGA
YEAR: 1989

DRIVIN' FORCE
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1990

» Paul Holmes is a software engineer and game developer, and the creator of *Hunter*.

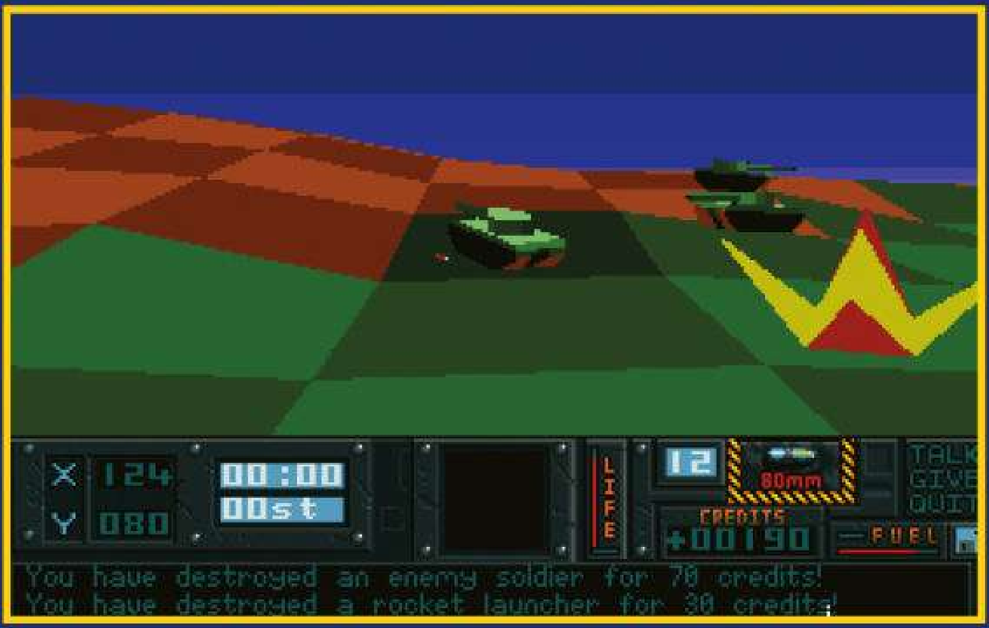
code." Alongside starting to write a simple game for the machine, Paul saw his first paycheque arrive after creating a digitised speech programme for Anco. "I used the tape reader as a one-bit sampler with a small microphone. The programme was used in *TerraNova*, for which I think I was paid £250." Paul recalls there being snow on the ground the day he met Anco's owner, Anil Gupta. "He offered to buy me some new trainers, as mine were falling apart."

With a new-trainer-adorned foot in the industry, Paul joined the 8-bit developer and publisher CRL Group in 1988. While working that job, he led a project that would strongly influence the development of *Hunter*. *Siege On London* reached the early stages of creation as a first-person perspective, sci-fi shooter. Online demos reveal that the game featured polygonal 3D graphics, and giant spider robot enemies reminiscent of *War Of The Worlds*. Sadly, work on the title would abruptly end at the demo stage. CRL Group began falling into administration. Simultaneously, Paul and his fellow programmers left the company to form the new studio Digital Magic.

Despite the setback, Paul would remain motivated to keep working on a game in the same open-world vein, which he continued as a personal project. "Like *Hunter*, *Siege On London* was going to be set across a large open terrain. My inspiration for this was my two favourite games of that time, *Faery Tale Adventure* and *Mercenary*, both of which had large maps that you could wander around," he says. By 1990, Paul had a rough prototype of a new Amiga game in this style ready to share. "I sent the demo to Activision and was invited to their Reading office to meet the producer Colin Fuidge. He liked the concept and signed me up with a contract that day."

Hunter pits you as a lone soldier, setting off from your headquarters to travel the islands and waters of an unnamed archipelago. "My inspiration for the landscape was a game called *Zarch*, which was a showpiece title for the BBC Acorn Archimedes," acknowledges Paul. Watching demos of *Zarch* online, with its patchwork of green and brown islands, polygonal windmills and bright blue seas, the lineage is clear to see.

Exploring *Hunter*'s islands involves walking, swimming and (most memorably) climbing aboard a diversity of land, sea or air vehicles scattered across the map. "What enabled me to make all the vehicles and other objects was the fact I had written a 3D object editor before I wrote the game," says Paul. "At that time, most people seemed to be creating

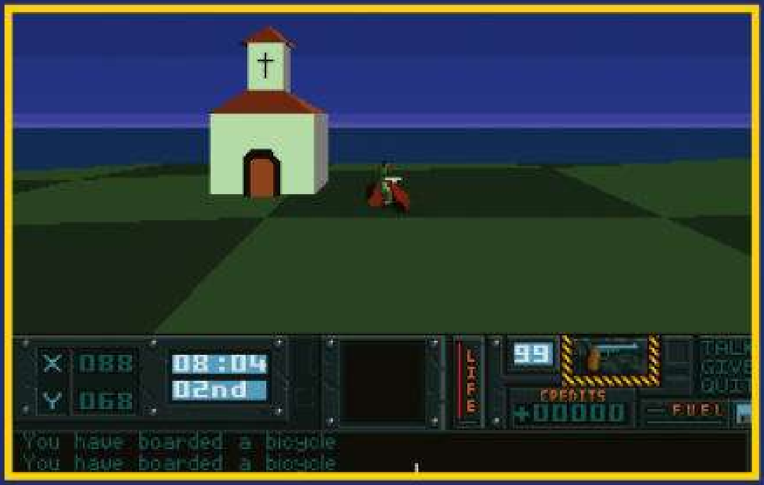


You have destroyed an enemy soldier for 70 credits!
You have destroyed a rocket launcher for 30 credits!

» [Amiga] Opposition soldiers will readily board nearby vehicles and pursue you for as long as it takes.

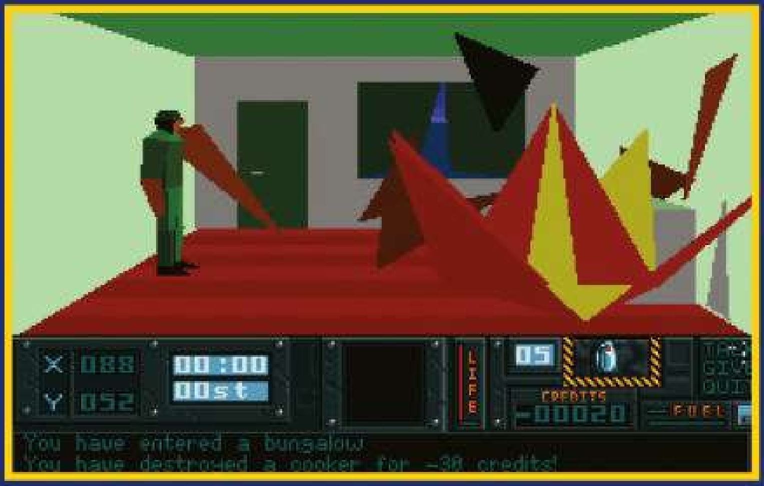
» [Amiga] Unlike *Far Cry 3*, punching sharks is not an option in *Hunter*.

> "MY INSPIRATION FOR THE LANDSCAPE WAS A GAME CALLED ZARCH, WHICH WAS A SHOWPIECE TITLE FOR THE BBC ACORN ARCHIMEDES"
> **PAUL HOLMES**



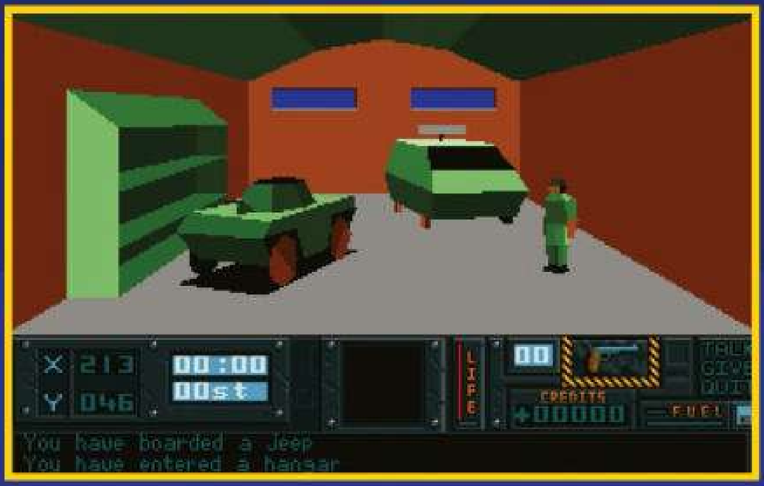
You have boarded a bicycle
You have boarded a bicycle

» [Amiga] Away from the action, you can spend calm moments in the archipelago simply cycling around sightseeing.



You have entered a bungalow
You have destroyed a cooker for -30 credits!

» [Amiga] Ever wanted to blow up domestic appliances with a grenade? *Hunter* makes it possible.



You have boarded a Jeep
You have entered a hangar

» [Amiga] Hangars will always have at least one vehicle inside them, and sometimes more.

their models on graph paper. The editor allowed me to create more complex models with animated parts, and relatively quickly." Having established this editor early in the development process, Paul could then concentrate on coding, creating objects and editing maps. He would create three distinct maps: one for each of the three gameplay modes on offer.

The first of these gameplay modes, simply called *Hunter*, sets you the sole mission of assassinating an enemy general and returning to base within a long time limit. Achieving this involves locating and talking to a series of mysterious characters. By logging the coordinates they provide onto your map, you find yourself coming closer to finding the general's hideout. Meanwhile, the Missions mode revolves around a series of goals (such as blowing up enemy structures) that must be completed sequentially. Finally, the Action mode populates the map with a list of enemy targets to destroy in any order.

Reflecting on these three options, Paul concedes that his original aim had been different. His plan had been to create a single, even larger-scale experience. "My hope had been to create a kind of open adventure, like *Faery Tale Adventure*. But what I ended up with didn't seem to be enough, and the potential for mission-based scenarios was easy to see and reasonably easy to add. Ultimately, I was up against deadlines as my contract was milestone based." This perhaps hints at the scale *Hunter* might have had with a longer development time and greater resources behind it. The game would ultimately be finished just six months after Paul signed with Activision. But while Paul may have had to compromise on some aspects of his vision, the versatility of having three gameplay modes was still very novel at a time when linear game design was still the norm.

> "THE EDITOR ALLOWED ME TO CREATE MORE COMPLEX MODELS WITH ANIMATED PARTS, AND RELATIVELY QUICKLY"
> PAUL HOLMES

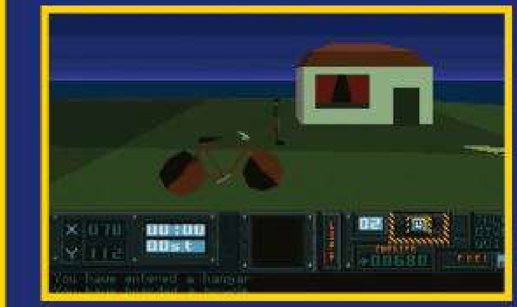
Despite being content to oversee the game design and coding alone, Paul recognised his limits when it came to the soundtrack. "Audio is not something I would have been any good at," he admits. "I mentioned this to Colin Fuidge early on, so he helped arrange for Martin Walker to become involved." Martin Walker is a prolific composer for Commodore 64 and Amiga, with a number of high-profile titles to his name including *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*. "Over the years, I had a lot of commissions from Software Studios, which handled European releases for Activision," Martin recalls. "That includes *Altered Beast*, *Galaxy Force II*, *Dragon Breed* and *Spindizzy Worlds* among others. So by the time they phoned me to discuss *Hunter*, we already had a great working relationship.

"The mood of my music matched the game well. Paul conveyed his requirements clearly, and he had heard plenty of my previous tracks, so we were both pleased with how it turned out." Neither Martin nor Paul remembers there needing to be much back and forth in discussions where the music was involved. "I suspect the words 'dark', 'epic' and 'moody' were involved when we spoke," Martin suggests. "Listening to the music tracks, there are lots of military snare patterns, powerful themes and triumphant endings."

Martin's dark and brooding soundtrack accompanies the main title, game over

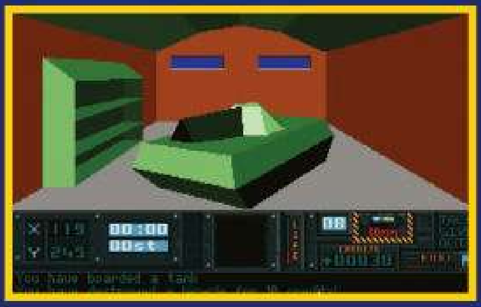
ON THE HUNT

THE STANDOUT VEHICLES FOR EXPLORING HUNTER'S ARCHIPELAGO



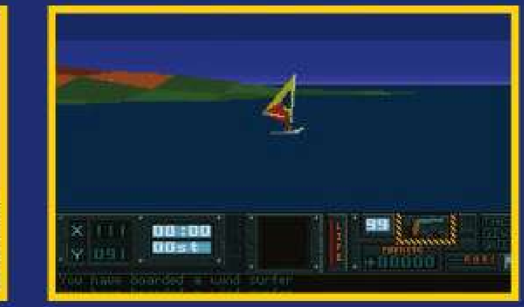
BICYCLE

Despite providing zero protection from enemy fire, cycling is a good bit faster than walking and has the advantage of not needing fuel. Bikes can often be found propped up outside churches, which feels very quaint. You'd half expect the vicar to pop out with a cup of tea.



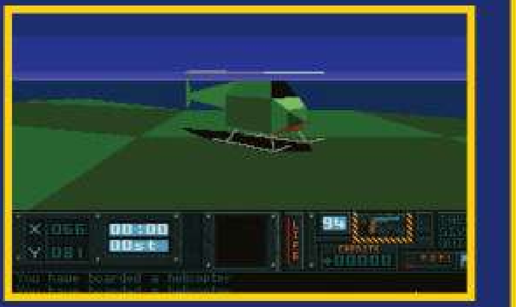
TANK

Two types of tanks can be found in hangars and close to enemy bases. The lighter, nimbler Sheridan has better handling, while the heftier Angus is good for an all-out assault. Both are heavily armoured and come with missile launchers. Ideal for destroying enemy buildings.



WINDSURFER

Using a windsurfer will give you a fashion boost if nothing else: your character will magically change into Bermuda shorts and a T-Shirt upon boarding. Windsurfers are agile and can easily swerve homing missiles. And unlike boats you will never have to worry about running out of gas.

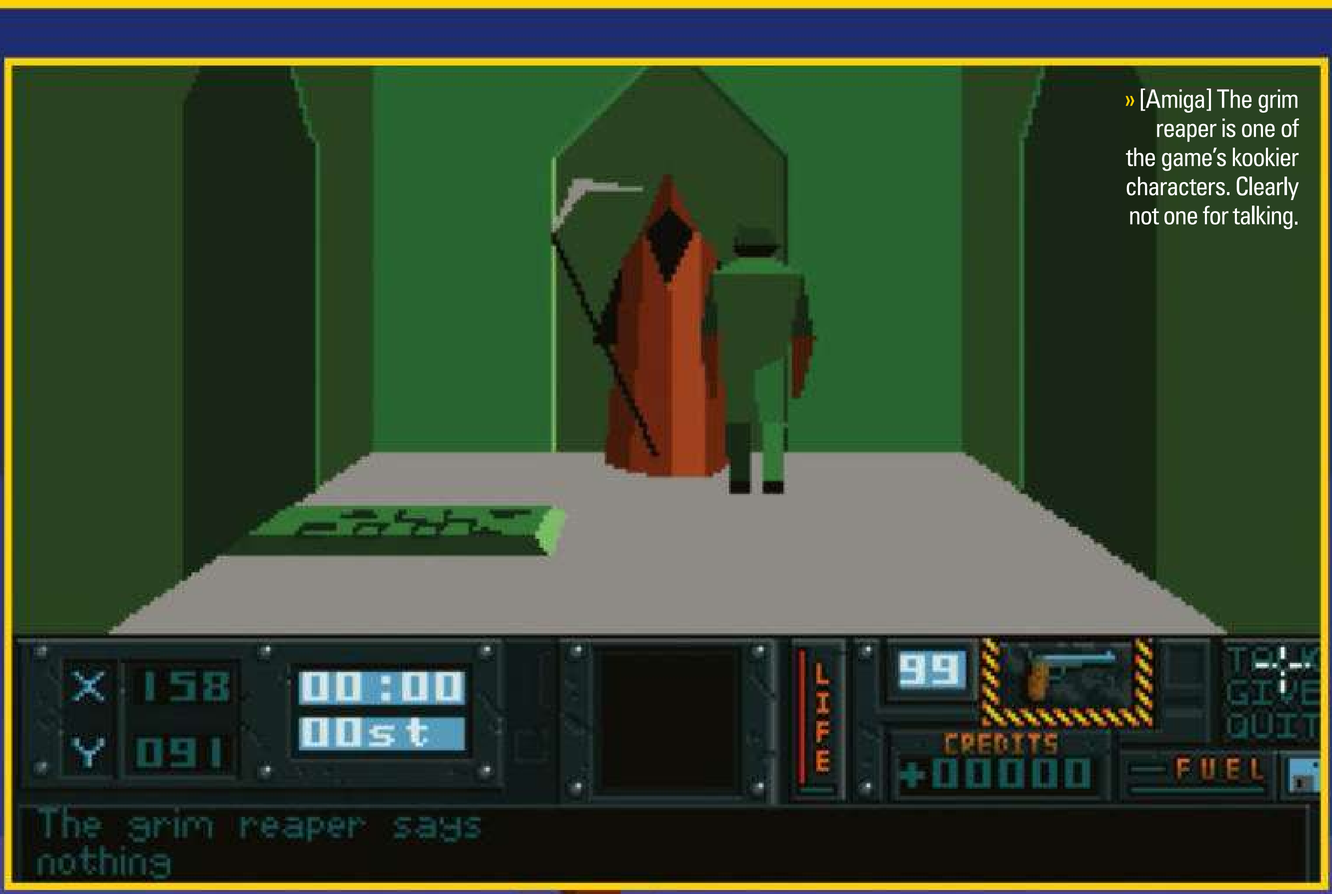


HELICOPTER

The helicopter is the fastest way to get around, but it's also very tricky to control. You are bound to crash the first few times you board. If you can master the handling, helicopters are a great asset in meeting mission time limits. Just don't forget to bring your parachute with you.

and game complete screens. However, the only audio during the game comes from ambient sound effects. Gulls squawk overhead. Waves lap gently in the distance. As you near an enemy radio satellite, the menacing hum of electricity will begin to fade in. On creating these sounds, Martin recalls, "With the Amiga you could use sampled sounds, which helped greatly with realism. The waves weren't too difficult on either the Amiga or the Atari ST, because I could use enveloped noise to simulate surf on the shore. I do remember that the sound effects were unusual in requiring variable volume to indicate how far they were away, so Paul and I probably had a chat about how to best implement this."

These sounds contribute heavily to the ambient and sometimes eerie ambience of ▶



The grim reaper says nothing

» [Amiga] The grim reaper is one of the game's kookier characters. Clearly not one for talking.

Hunter's world. Strolling or cycling around the islands can almost feel quite zen. Until you stumble across an enemy stronghold, that is, on which a cacophony of gunfire, explosions and helicopter blades ensues.

On its release in September 1991, *Hunter* was consistently well-reviewed. Both the Amiga and Atari ST versions achieved averaged scores of 90% in popular magazines of the era. *Amiga Format* described it as "very, very different" and said its "stunning 3D system is used to create a very original game". *Amiga Computing* acknowledged the versatile gameplay, celebrating that, "With so many variations possible no two games need to be alike." *CU Amiga* also praised the autonomy on offer, "Apart from being big, *Hunter* is also incredibly absorbing. Although the missions have time-limits there are no constraints as to how you must complete them, and this flexibility is severely lacking in past attempts at accessible 3D games." Similarly, *Atari Mania* said, "There's a marvellous feeling of freedom, of being able to do almost anything you like."

Among the criticisms, a few reviewers picked up on some non-critical glitches, which are occasionally noticeable playing the game today too. Sections of the landscape can sometimes pop in and out of view. You might find yourself floating in a tank as you pass over a hill, or becoming stuck behind an item pick-up inside a building. Replaying the game today, there's a certain charm to these rough edges. The same goes for the various humorous and idiosyncratic touches that Paul snuck into the design, from his initials being graffitied on building walls, to finding a grim reaper NPC you can talk to inside a crypt. They serve as reminders that *Hunter* was ultimately the personal project of a solo developer, doing his own thing – much as he allowed players to do within the game.

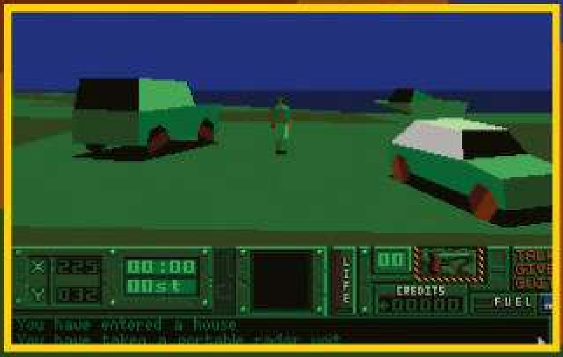
In recent years, *Hunter* has been noted in the gaming press for being ahead of its time. It can be found celebrated in numerous articles on the history of open-world gaming, while in 2017 the *Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition* book labelled it the "first 3D open-world action adventure". Gaming forums and Amiga websites are full of warm comments and recollections about how impressive its world felt at the time of release.

In 2015, still images from a half-completed fan remake demo were showcased online, putting a high-definition spin on the vehicles and characters. *Hunter* has also been the subject of a *Doom* mod tribute, which you can enjoy watching on YouTube. The juxtaposition of *Hunter*'s blocky terrain, vehicles and crimson-uniformed enemies, with first-person perspective graphics and *Doom*'s sound effects is fun to behold.

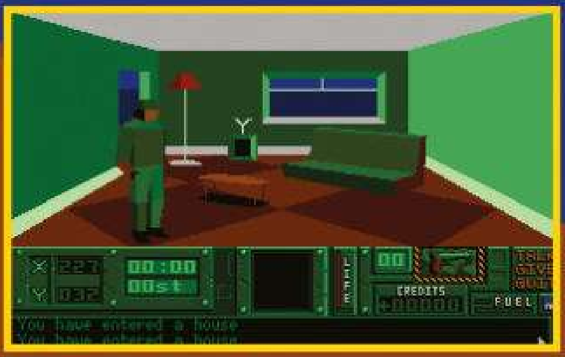
These fan projects really show the fondness that has remained with the game. Sadly, Paul doesn't remember this player passion being matched with a great degree of commercial success or much in the way of royalties for his work. "That was possibly partly due to Activision merging with The Disc Company during the development of the game, and they were not really a games company. Piracy of Amiga games was also rife at the time. I did try to push another game after *Hunter*, including going to see Fergus McGovern at Probe with a demo in hand. But at that time consoles were taking over, so it proved difficult to find a publisher for an Amiga game."

In the following years, Paul would build a career in software development. "I got out of the games industry about 25 years ago and have worked in embedded software, mainly the TV broadcast industry, although I recently moved to an electric-vehicle charging company." Martin would branch into journalism and continue composing music, which he does today at yewtreemagic.co.uk While *Hunter* was a small project for him in the grand scheme of his career, and completed in a few weeks, he says, "I do still get compliments about the music of *Hunter*, even after all this time, which is lovely."

While creating the game, did Paul realise that many players – as forum comments and online reviews now attest to – simply enjoyed running wild in the game and enjoying the freedom it afforded them? "I don't recall anticipating how people would approach the gameplay," he admits. "I just made something I would like to play." ✱



You have entered a house.
You have taken a portable radar unit



You have entered a house
You have entered a house

GRAND THEFT ATARI

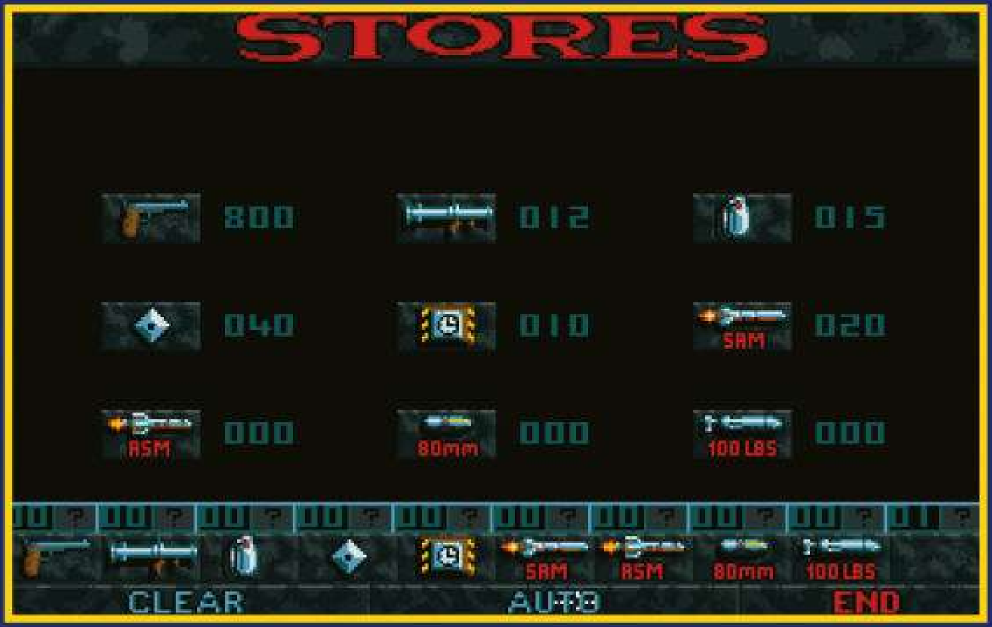
CONVERTING HUNTER TO THE ATARI ST

Hunter was designed on an Amiga 500, and it was originally intended as an Amiga exclusive. But that changed late on in the development process. "Initially I had no plans for an Atari ST version of the game," Paul confirms. "But when Activision merged with The Disc Company during the development, I was offered some more advance to create the Atari version. It was not too difficult. I had to rewrite the polygon renderer, add some 2D stuff and then add the sounds."

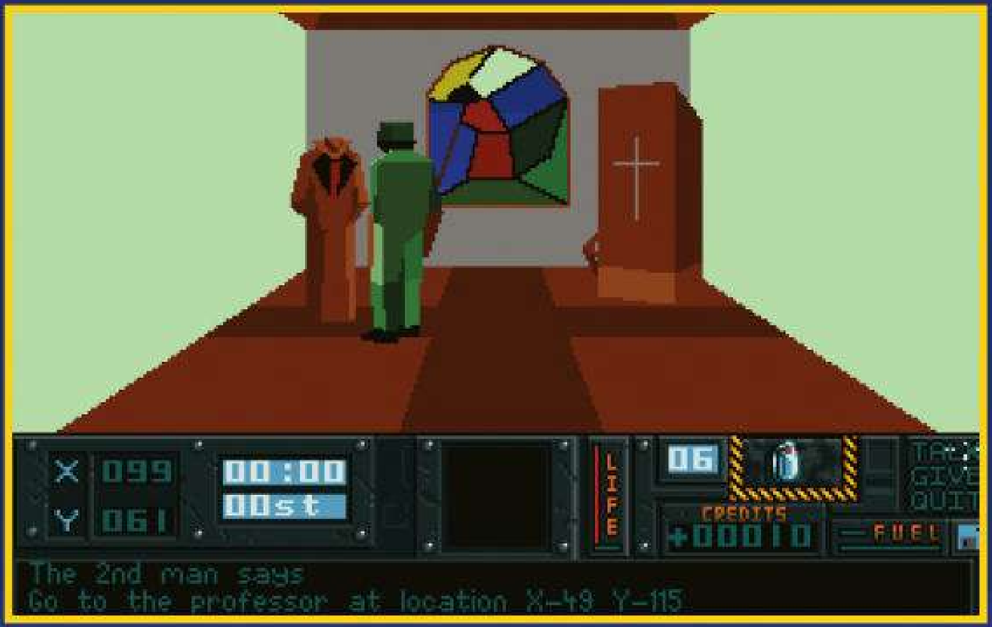
Martin remembers it being difficult to achieve the same level of sound quality for the Atari ST version. "I created the Amiga music on tracker software. The Atari ST version used the same instrument samples as the Amiga, but with all the same notes entered again using Microdeal's Quartet four-channel sample sequencer. I worked on sound effects completely separately for the Amiga and Atari ST versions. The sampled seagulls in the Amiga version do sound a lot better."

Like the sound, the graphics of the Atari ST version are less refined, with fewer colours. Most notably this comes across in an entirely green HUD. Nonetheless, the game plays smoothly and lacks none of the features that make the Amiga version so enjoyable.

As another final task, The Disc Company asked Paul to create French and German language versions of the game. "They flew me to Paris for that (where they were based) but did not bother to tell me they had moved offices."



» [Amiga] The store allows you to trade in your credits for a variety of weapons.



The 2nd man says
Go to the professor at location X-43 Y-115

» [Amiga] Finding the enemy general involves following clues, mapping coordinates and speaking to shady characters.

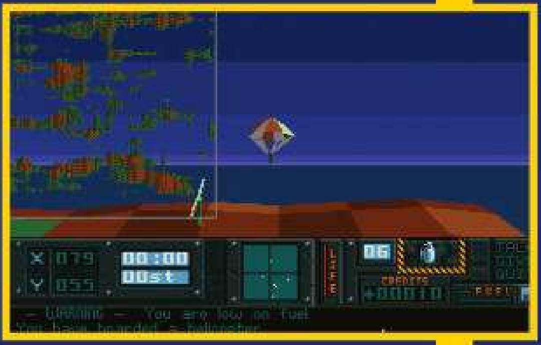
> “I DO STILL GET COMPLIMENTS ABOUT THE MUSIC OF HUNTER, EVEN AFTER ALL THIS TIME, WHICH IS LOVELY”
> **MARTIN WALKER**

STANDING PROUD

HOW HUNTER LEVELLED-UP FROM ITS PEERS

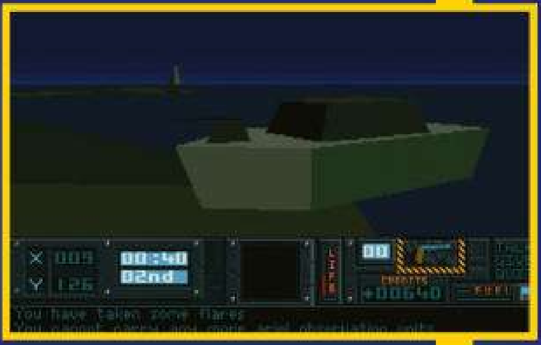
SANDBOX GAMEPLAY

■ The autonomy *Hunter* offers was a revelation to many players. Exploring and experimenting is half the fun, from parachuting out of helicopters to going long-distance swimming. You can even blow up your own headquarters for minus 3,000 credits, if you feel the urge.



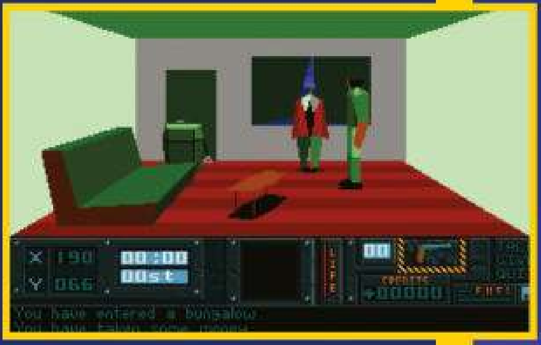
NIGHT AND DAY

■ The game has a relatively sophisticated night-and-day cycle, with conditions darkening gradually as the in-game clock progresses and evening falls. Enemies and buildings are harder to see at night, at which point flares can be a valuable means of lighting up your surroundings.



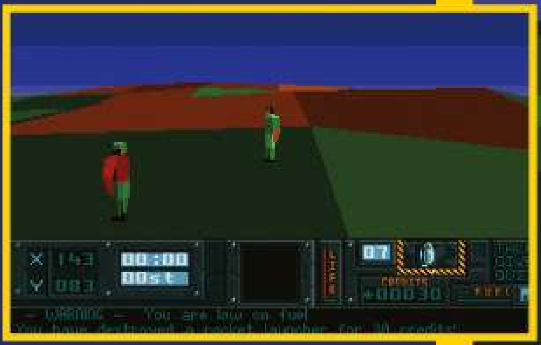
STEALTH TACTICS

■ With *Hitman* still decades away, *Hunter* enabled you to slip into an enemy uniform and sneak into their ranks undetected. Finding the red outfit inside a building early on can be a real help on missions. Approach a vehicle, though, and suspicions will be raised.



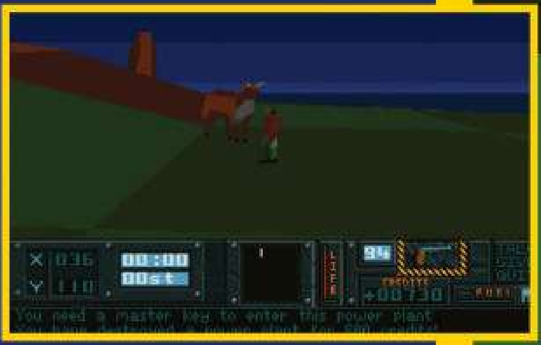
SMART AI

■ *Hunter* was recognised as having quite advanced enemy AI for the time. Soldiers readily jump into tanks and give chase. They will also jump into the water and swim away if threatened by your erratic driving. Homing missiles from gun turrets will track your movements.



MORAL COMPASS

■ Actions have consequences. Destroying flora or fauna (tempting as it may be faced with incessant gull squawking) will accrue negative credits. This can hamper your efforts to buy equipment or bribe NPCs. Conversely, felling enemy soldiers or their buildings will put you in the plus.



BIO

Although the Mega Drive, Master System and Game Gear all received versions of *Castle Of Illusion*, the 8-bit and 16-bit versions of Mickey Mouse's Sega debut were rather different games, so it makes perfect sense that the series diverged from there. Mickey teamed up with Donald Duck for *World Of Illusion* on the Mega Drive, while the 8-bit systems received the solo adventure *Land Of Illusion*. It was no slouch though, earning excellent reviews on both formats in magazines including *Mean Machines Sega*, *Sega Power*, *Sega Force* and *Sega Pro*.

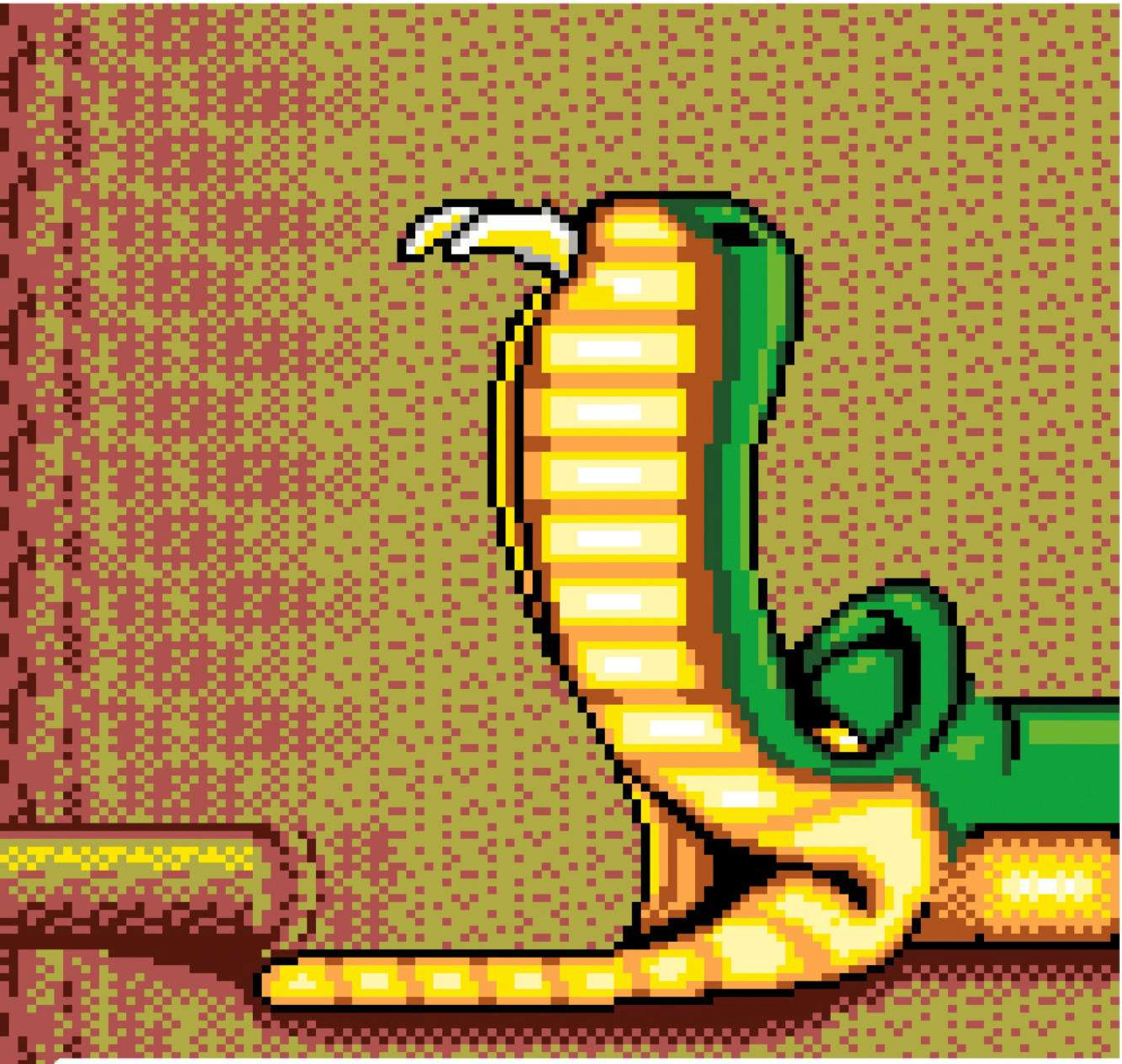
CLASSIC MOMENTS

Land Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

» **PLATFORM:** MASTER SYSTEM » **RELEASED:** 1993 » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA

Making your way through the forest stage that opens *Land Of Illusion*, you're subjected to all the fun that nature has to offer. Of course, we're using a certain definition of fun, as not everybody is particularly fond of spiders or snakes. Thankfully, Mickey Mouse is no Indiana Jones, and has no qualms about destroying slithery things by bouncing on them with his bottom.

That works just fine, until Mickey encounters a snake so large that no amount of weaponised rump will see it off. The giant creature is coiled around a tree, and is sturdy enough for Mickey to walk right up to the top on its back. Just as you're contemplating how you might defeat this mighty foe, you spot its wide-open mouth – and a single apple. Could it really be so simple? Leaping into the air, Mickey feeds the snake and unexpectedly gains safe passage across its head. *



MORE CLASSIC LAND OF ILLUSION MOMENTS

Blazing Speed

POWER
TRIES
SCORE
TIME
×03
0000000
370

What's worse than trying to escape a burning building? Trying to escape a burning building when the fire has grown legs and is literally chasing you. Yes, Mickey has to contend with this absurd situation, and what's worse is that the fire can squeeze through small gaps that the world's most famous mouse can't.

Current Crisis

POWER
TRIES
AIR
TIME
×00
251

In the second stage, Mickey manages to get into an underground waterway and there's only one way forward. Unfortunately, there's also a strong current that will intermittently push him backwards. The solution? Grab on to the plant life and cling to it until the worst has passed – just don't forget to come up for air.

Shifting Sands

POWER
TRIES
SCORE
TIME
×03
0001010
456

Late in the game, Mickey's got a treacherous path through a sandy stage that is full of hazards. As well as reasonably sized enemy crabs, there are small platforms that crumble at the slightest touch, and areas in which the only way under the low ceilings is to risk death by intentionally sinking into the quicksand.

» *Driver* creator Martin Edmondson thinks a reboot should have true-to-life car damage and look like a movie.

THE EVOLUTION OF DRI

INSPIRED BY A SEVENTIES MOVIE AND A COURSE FROM DESTRUCTION DERBY, DRIVER'S TRUE-TO-LIFE OPEN WORLD AND 'ANYTHING GOES' APPROACH WERE A REVELATION. MARTIN EDMONDSON REVIEWS THE ROUTE TAKEN BY HIS GROUNDBREAKING GAME AND ITS INNOVATIVE FOLLOW-UPS

VER

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

DRV 05
SAN FRANCISCO

> **"I LIKED THAT ELEMENT OF CHOICE AND FREEDOM, AND THE IDEA OF DRIVER BEING SET IN A LIVING, BREATHING CITY"**
> **MARTIN EDMONDSON**

Drive responsibly; that's what you're taught as a learner driver. Of course, that's not the case when you're driving in a videogame, or if you're a demolition-derby driver. Hollywood action movies are another exception. The latter was of great interest to a young Martin Edmondson, but as he explains, all three fed into a project that first came to him when his firm Reflections Interactive got into PlayStation development. "The inspiration for *Driver* came from a childhood obsession with car chases," Martin enthuses. "The first film I ever went to see in the cinema was the Ryan O'Neal film *The Driver*, and that really stuck with me. My dad actually went to see it on his own first – just to make sure it wasn't too violent for me, because I was only a little kid. But he thought it was right up my street, so we went as a family and watched it. So there was a bit of that from the point of view of *general* inspirations. Then during the design of *Destruction Derby*, one track had a crossover in the middle, and I remember driving up to it slowly, and thinking it would be fantastic if there were traffic lights and traffic, and if you could decide to go right or left or straight on. That was the earliest inspiration in terms of how *Driver* would *play*."

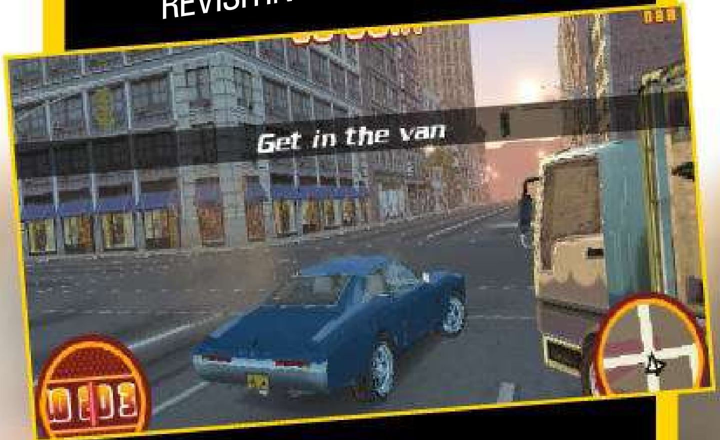
The success of *Destruction Derby* led to a sequel, however, then Reflections made a monster-truck racer. But once these were shipped, Martin dreamt up an open world for *Driver*. "I liked that element of choice and freedom, and the idea of *Driver* being set in a living, breathing city," Martin notes. "So we had pedestrians sat in cafes and walking around. There was a working traffic system, and police cars looking for people speeding. It was set in real cities because of the game's movie inspirations, so we picked cities that were in films that people might have

▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

DRIVER 76

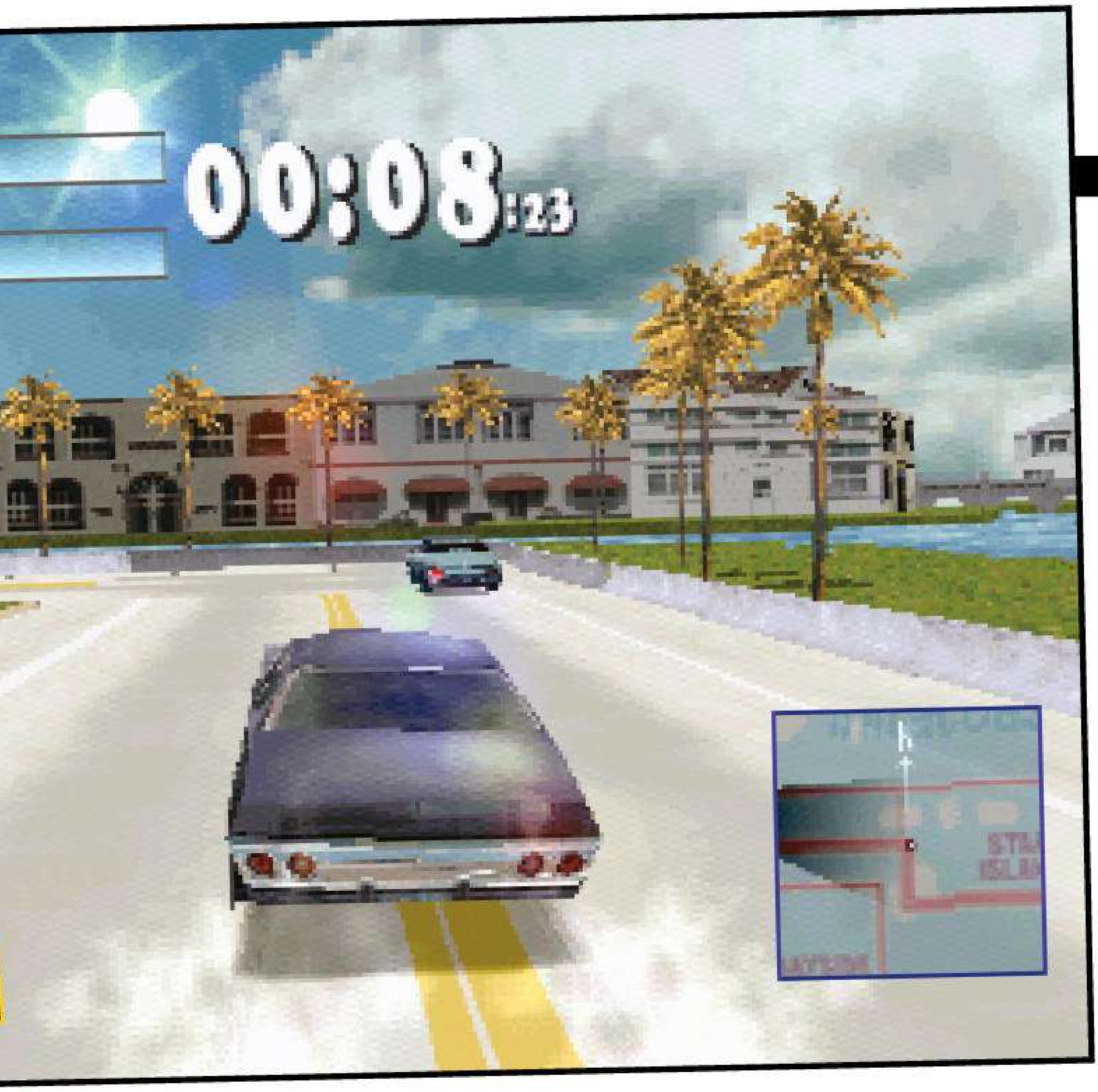
REVISITING THE PSP SPIN-OFF



Technically speaking, this PlayStation Portable exclusive is both a follow-up and a prequel to *Driver: Parallel Lines*; insomuch as it came out a year after its PS2 predecessor but is set two years before its 1978-set first half. Both games play out in New York, but where *Parallel Lines* has a protagonist known as TK, *Driver 76* is fronted by one of the PS2 game's supporting characters – wheelman Ray Davies.

Another of the *Parallel Lines* cast – Slink, a small-time crook – introduces Ray to bigger players in the criminal underground and provides him with his first few missions. Like those in *Parallel Lines*, *Driver 76*'s challenges are largely driving-based, but some require you to shoot-up other vehicles while driving after them, and others involve third-person on-foot fire fights. Crucially, these carry over the auto-aim gunsight from *Parallel Lines* rather than using the tricky-to-use manual one from the earlier title *Driv3r*.

Where *Driver 76* truly differentiates itself from previous titles in the series is with its cutscenes, in that they're depicted as a comic book rather than as full-motion videos. This actually suits the game very well, as it allows for straightforward linear storytelling that proceeds at a pace, which is perfect for neatly taking you from one high-octane mission to the next while maintaining enough plot to make you care for its principal characters.

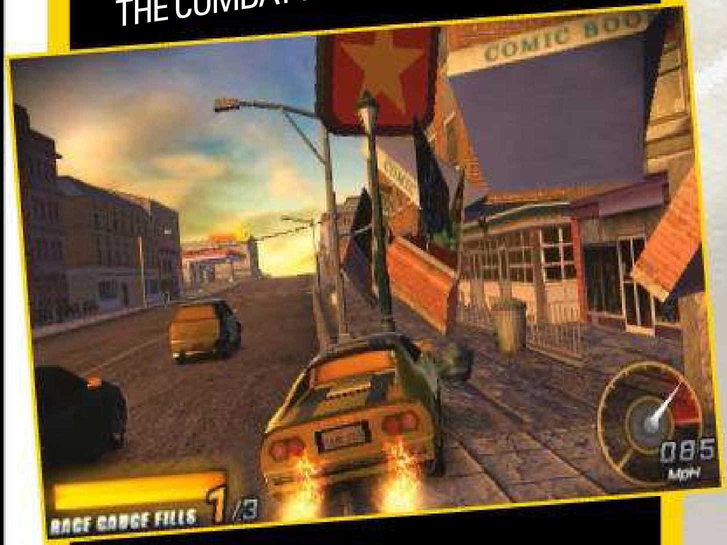


» [PlayStation] Miami is just one of the open-world cities that you can explore while tackling *Driver*'s missions.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

DRIVER: RENEGADE 3D

THE COMBAT-FOCUSSED 3DS OUTING



Although its missions are entirely combat-based, it would be unfair to call *Driver: Renegade 3D* an off-shoot of the series. After all, combat missions in *Driver* titles date all the way back to the original game. What sets *Renegade 3D* apart more is its comedic ultraviolence, where reality takes a backseat to allow Tanner to carry out a reign of terror interspersed with cool one-liners.

The highly unlikely narrative that makes Tanner's wave of wanton destruction possible hinges on a deal he makes with a senator to clean up New York City, which in effect gives the now former undercover cop a licence to smash-up public property, and to kill and terrify criminals, without fear of arrest. As mentioned, the way this plays out ignores the laws of physics, in so much as evildoers' cars and even small buildings explode the instant Tanner rams into them!

Quite often, destruction is the sole objective of *Renegade 3D*'s missions, and these challenges have a wonderfully named Rage Gauge that fills-up based on the severity of the carnage Tanner lets loose. The ultimate goal being to fill the gauge a required number of times.

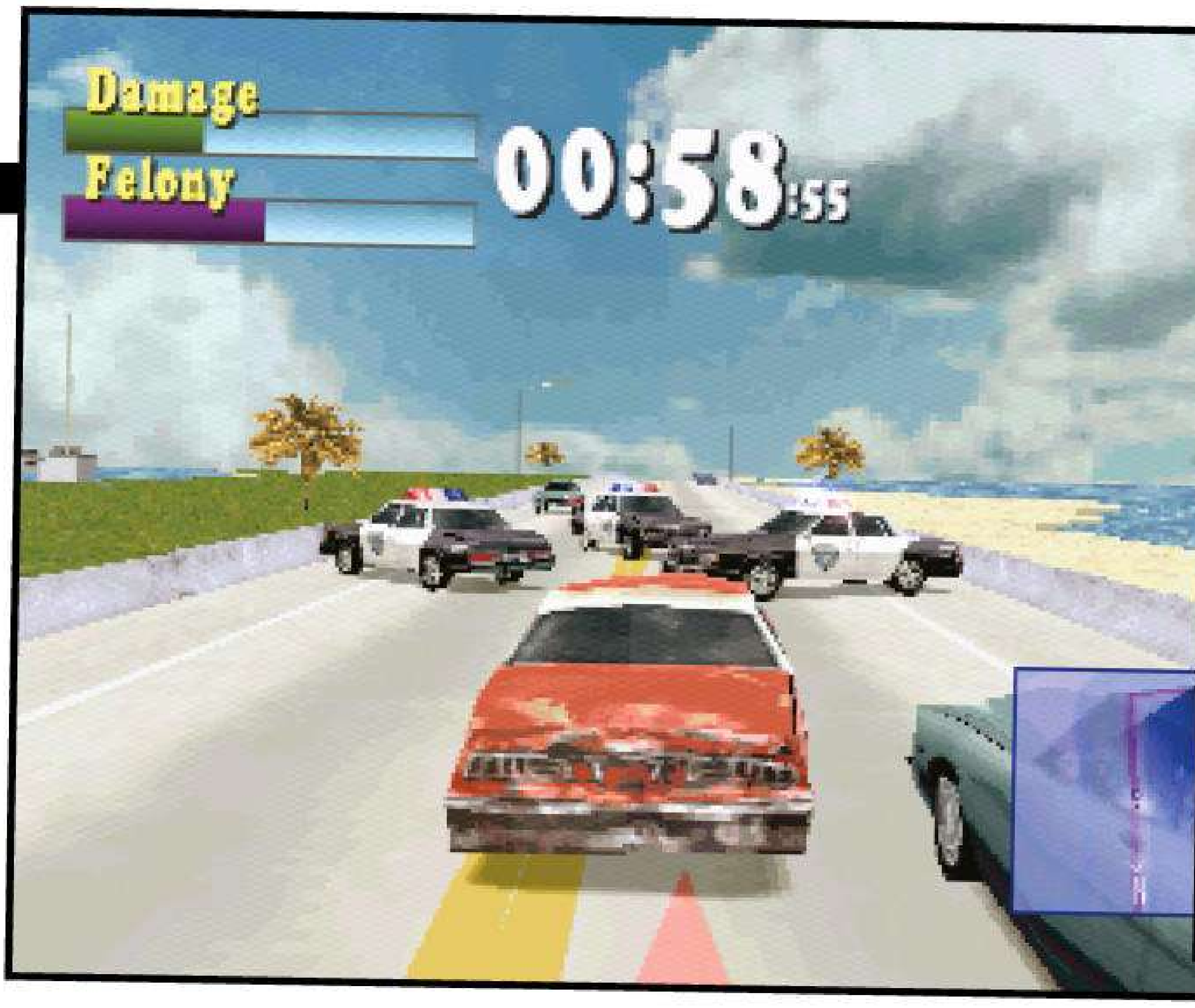
You might imagine this focus on violence would grow old quickly, but in actual fact *Renegade 3D*'s missions are varied. You might have a chase challenge followed by a timed event, for example, much like the 3DS title's predecessors.

seen – San Francisco from *Bullitt* was an obvious one. It was also to immerse you more in a real world, and it really helped with the immersion if you were Steve McQueen for the day when you were playing it. Another reason for putting it in real cities was that I was always quite fascinated by the idea of simulating real places, so if you wanted to you could just drive to Miami Beach."

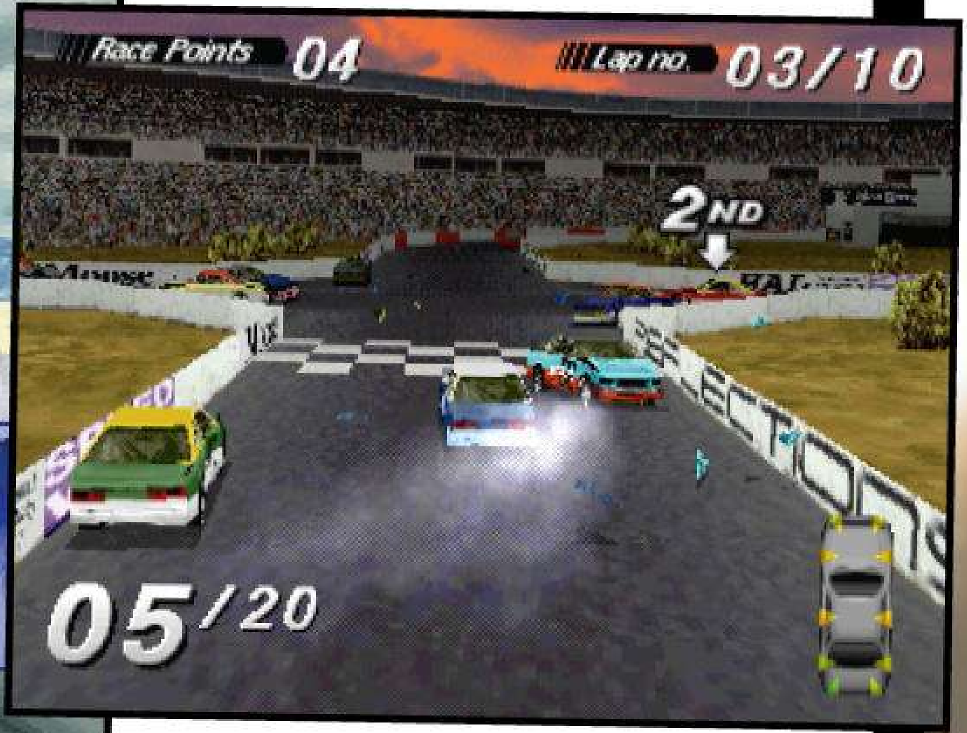
Besides creating an interactive environment, Martin was also devising gameplay, and as *Driver* was going to keep you behind the wheel it had to be entirely driving-related. "There were only so many things that we could do when you were always in a car," Martin reasons. "So it was structured in terms of you could be going from A to B as fast as possible in a way that you didn't get spotted by cops or where you didn't do any damage to the car, or you could be chasing somebody or someone could be chasing you. So there were all these little 'levers' of the mission structures, and those gave us a bunch of different play styles. We then put those into missions that fitted the story."

The storyline fuelling *Driver*'s missions was then tweaked when its intended publisher called for a more heroic protagonist, although this didn't make him more responsible. "He started as a getaway driver, but he ended up as an undercover cop," Martin says of *Driver*'s player character Tanner. "Originally the game was going to be published by Sony. At that point it was about a getaway driver, but Sony said we really needed to make him somebody you could aspire to be, rather than a criminal. So one of us suggested we make him an undercover cop

02:14:26
Damage
Felony
01:35:13
Go shopping
NO TRUCKS VANS



» [PlayStation] You're an undercover cop in *Driver*, but the player character was originally a getaway driver.



» [PlayStation] The crossover section of a *Destruction Derby* track gave Martin Edmondson the idea for *Driver*.

doing all of the same stuff but for the benefit of society. In real life he wouldn't be allowed to do any of that, but it was only a videogame!"

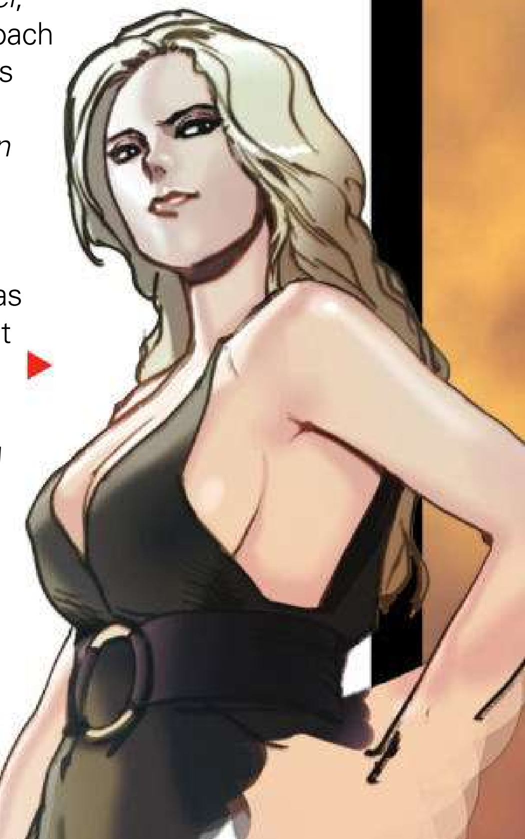
Rather than Tanner, *Driver*'s reviews focussed on its realism and car handling. Its sequel retained undocumented aspects of the latter, but discarded *Driver*'s infamous unforgiving initiation level. "We didn't *drop* the 'auto-handbrake' – it wasn't really a feature," Martin points out. "But we had a trick to get the vehicle handling like that, which was to gradually introduce the handbrake as you were turning, and that was still there in *Driver 2*. *Driver*'s garage had been inspired by a brilliant sequence in the film *The Driver*, where Ryan O'Neal bashed a Mercedes to pieces, scaring all the robbers in it. The only reason the garage level was there was that it was inspired by the film; that was a little bit of an excuse to get it in. But really it was about proving you were good enough to be a getaway driver. The mistake I made was demanding you passed it, and in only 60 seconds!"

As well as refinements, *Driver 2* also innovated, with its most obvious new feature being the ability to get out of a car and run off on-foot to find an alternative vehicle. "I think it was a natural progression, because I really wanted the player not to be stuck in the one car for an entire block of missions, like some of those in *Driver*," Martin considers. "You couldn't do much when you were on-foot except for changing vehicles, but you could flick switches to open garages and that sort of thing, which just seemed like natural things to be able to do. It also gave a feeling of believability, because you didn't have to get *this* car, you could get *that* car over there instead."

In terms of evolution, *Driver*'s follow-up included cities with curved roads as well as right-angled ones, which cut down on the hard rights and lefts required of players. "We made big changes to how the engine worked, so the roads could curve instead of being 90-degrees," Martin remembers. "A lot of cities are just blocks; so the likes of New York and Miami. They are just left, right and straight on. But *Driver 2* was set in cities like Havana, and we wanted more subtlety to it where you were turning proper bends. The US cities still had 90-degree turns, and even Havana's city centre was grid-like. It was just that when you got out into the country or wherever the game took on a slightly different style."

Another aspect of the sequel revisited an underused element of the game that had inspired the original *Driver*, although *Driver 2*'s approach to two-player games was very different. "We had multiplayer in *Destruction Derby* using the link-up cable," Martin reviews, "and that worked really well, but the problem was that most people weren't going to lug a TV around ▶

"DRIVER 2 WAS SET IN CITIES LIKE HAVANA, AND WE WANTED MORE SUBTLETY TO IT WHERE YOU WERE TURNING PROPER BENDS"
MARTIN EDMONDSON



Damage
Felony
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01:08
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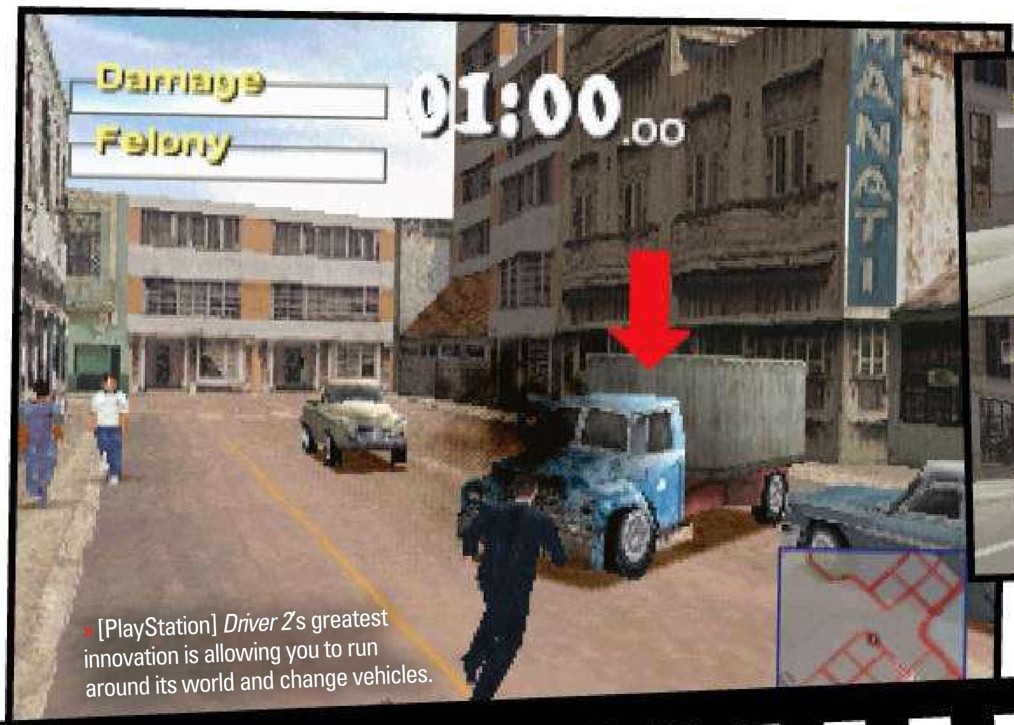
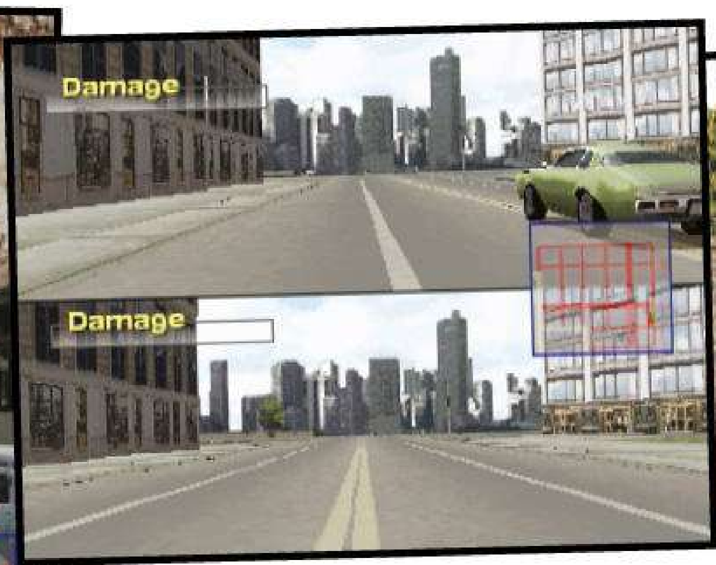
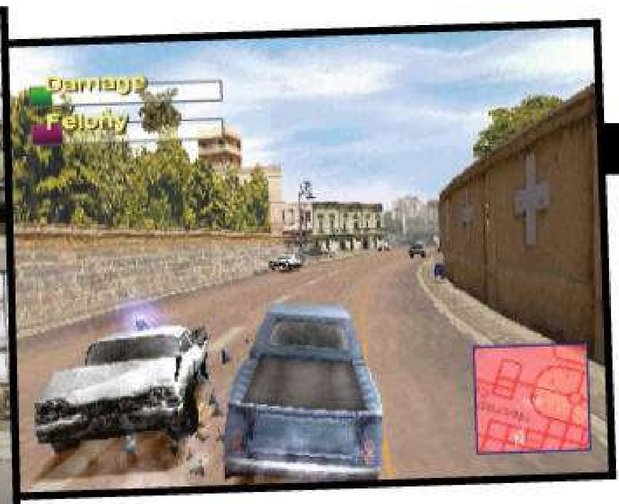


» [PlayStation] *Driver 2*'s greatest innovation is allowing you to run around its world and change vehicles.



» [PlayStation] The split-screen multiplayer in *Driver 2* avoids the need to link two PlayStations together.



» [PlayStation] Unlike *Driver*, the roads in *Driver 2* have curved roads as well as 90-degree turns.

▶ to a friend's house. But split-screen was a whole different matter, so we decided with *Driver 2* being a game with car chases it would work really well with split-screen multiplayer."

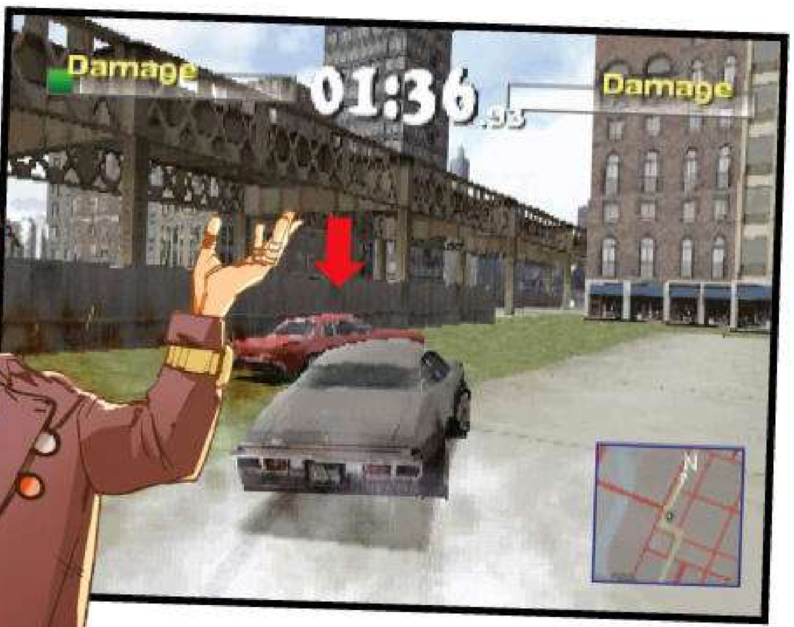
Released as the PlayStation's popularity waned, *Driver 2* nevertheless attracted praise. Its follow-up was designed for the PS2, and offered various modes of transportation. "The motorbikes were just because a lot of people that liked cars liked bikes as well," Martin explains. "It was also another challenge. For the boats, I think that was because we went back to Miami, where you use boats to get around as much as you use cars. The reason for the swimming was just that it didn't seem realistic to have Tanner fall into the water and drown!"

Of the areas where *Driv3r* built on its predecessor, its on-foot play got the biggest overhaul. In so much as it focussed on third and first-person shooter challenges. "We expanded the on-foot stuff so you could shoot people and do missions," Martin recalls. "The problem was that we had no experience of first-person or third-person shooters, so the work entailed was absolutely huge. We had the movement designed like a FPS, so if you pressed left and right you strafed, and if you pulled back you ran backwards. That looked weird in third-person, but in first-person it felt completely natural. With hindsight, I'm not sure which way around we should have done it."

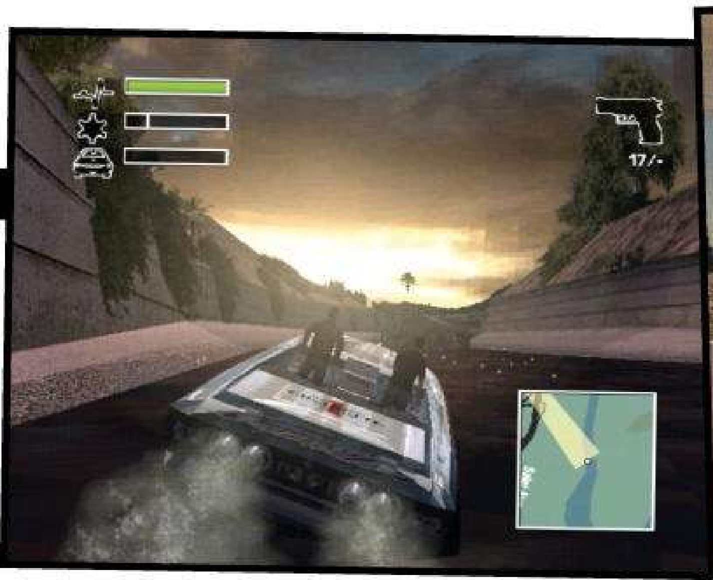
> "WE EXPANDED THE ON-FOOT STUFF SO YOU COULD SHOOT PEOPLE. THE PROBLEM WAS THAT WE HAD NO EXPERIENCE OF FIRST-PERSON OR THIRD-PERSON SHOOTERS"
>
> **MARTIN EDMONDSON**

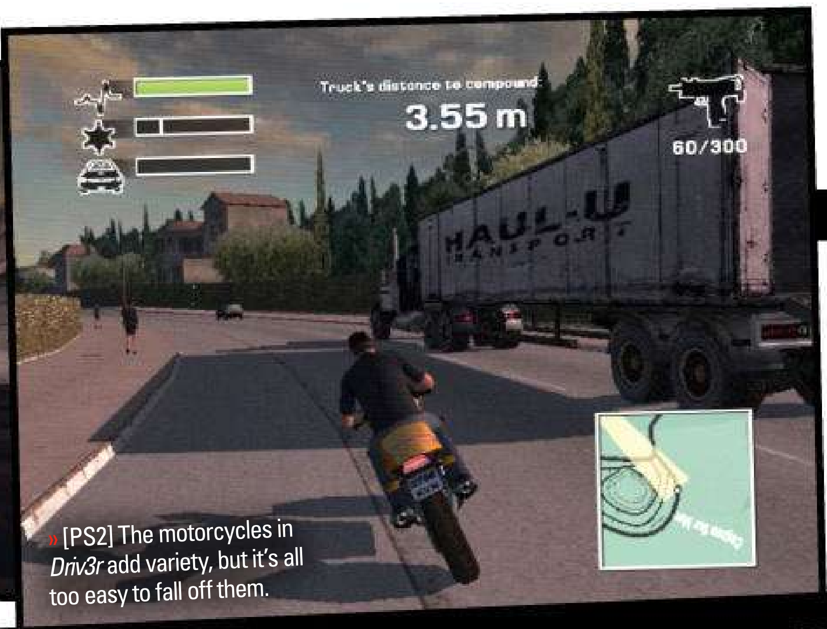
Another type of firefight in *Driv3r* was less ambiguous, more specifically the game's backseat shoot-outs, where a heavily armed Tanner would leave the driving to an ally. "I'd seen those mechanics used in various arcade games, and they were always fun," Martin grins. "It obviously also fitted in with the story that some guy was driving and you were hanging a machine gun out of the car and shooting. So it was just a bit more mayhem. The unlimited ammo and over-the-top weapons were from action movies. At that point, they were starting to become a lot more over the top, with rapid inter-cuts, explosions and pyrotechnics. So it was a nod to that."

More complex, and arguably less successful, was the option of employing alternate strategies to beat *Driv3r*'s challenges, although in some cases this worked very well. "I liked the idea of solving missions in different ways, but most people would just play through a mission as they decided to," Martin sighs. "They would then solve it and be on to the next one, so it was misplaced hope that it would make missions more interesting. One example that did work was when it was just down to choosing the right vehicle. You got to play as Tanner or

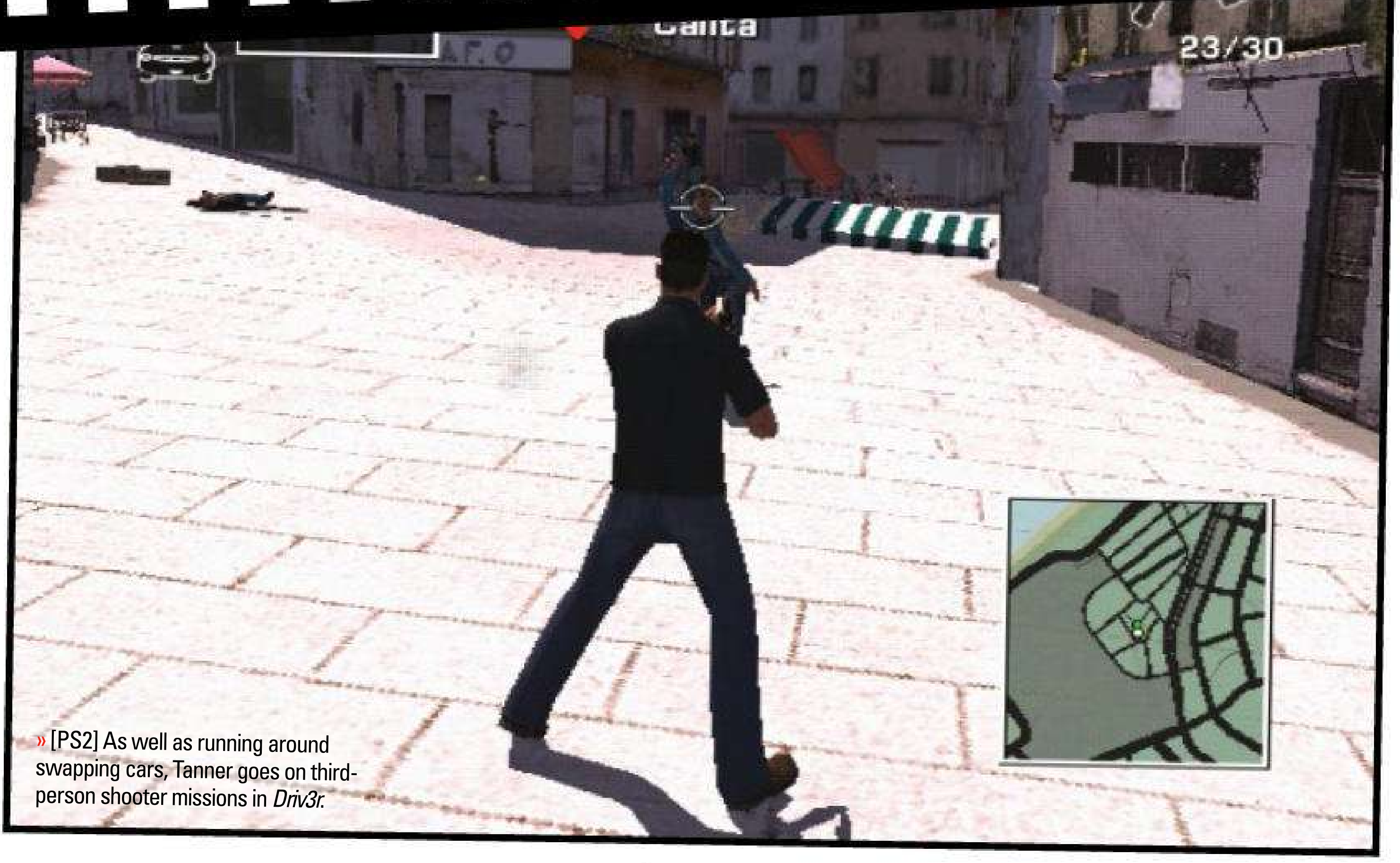


» [PlayStation] The inclusion of Chicago in *Driver 2* was down to *The French Connection* being set there.





[PS2] The motorcycles in *Driv3r* add variety, but it's all too easy to fall off them.



» [PS2] As well as running around swapping cars, Tanner goes on third-person shooter missions in *Driv3r*.

his partner Jones in one mission as well. That worked OK too. But otherwise the net effect was two weeks of work that wasn't necessary."

When released, *Driv3r* received mixed reviews. Martin then briefly worked on its follow-up – *Parallel Lines*, during which time its narrative was split between the Seventies and the modern day. "I was only involved very early on, but from a visual point of view I remember talking about how having different time zones would allow some interest there in terms of the style and feel – also the music and so on," Martin muses. "There were also some really nice opportunities in the back and forth with the character in two different times, so there were lots of interesting things there."

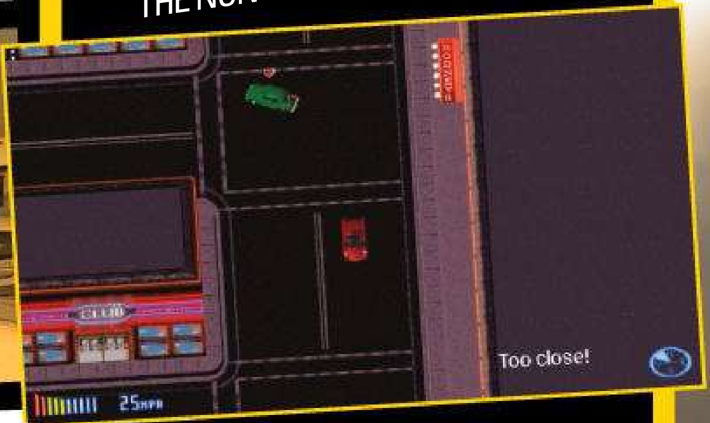
Another early decision recognised that gaming had changed since the original *Driver* had come out, and so *Driver: Parallel Lines* was made more forgiving. "I remember us deciding that we would allow players to crash through things, and that was for playability reasons," Martin observes. "It was also because more casual players started coming into the scene. In *Driver*, if you hit a lamppost it would suddenly stop your car. Now that was realistic, but clipping a lamppost and being stopped dead in your tracks was irritating. Smashing through things also looked dramatic, and while doing that to big objects might have been unrealistic it improved the flow of the game."

There were also evolutions in *Parallel Lines*, such as ▶

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

DRIVER: VEGAS & LA UNDERCOVER

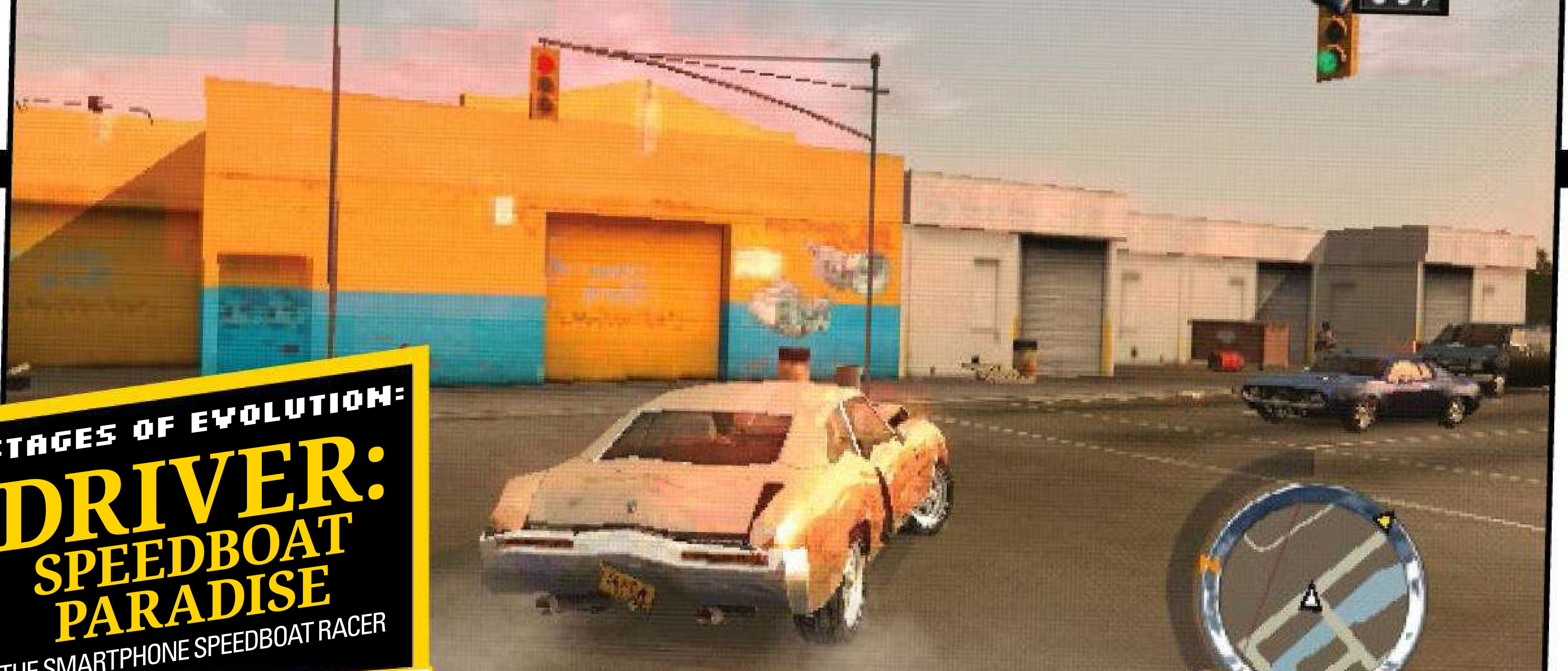
THE NON-CANON MOBILE TITLES



It's important to note that the 2006 release *Driver: Vegas* (shown above) and the 2007 release *Driver: LA Undercover* are Java titles – pre-smartphone era. So allowances have to be made for the hardware and screen resolution they were designed for. Think Atari ST, and you'll have a good idea of the restrictions they were made under. To put it another way; neither game comes close to emulating the audiovisuals of the PlayStation original. That said, the gameplay of the two *Driver* phone games is more important.

The top-down *Driver: Vegas* falls slightly short on this score. There are some good ideas – like tailing criminals and taking down bosses in casinos. Those are concepts that belong in the *Driver* world. The problem lies in their implementation, which is just too simplistic to hold your interest for long.

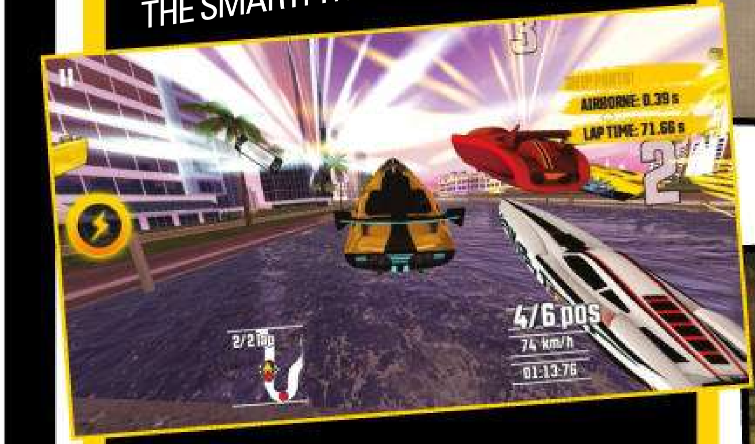
In terms of presentation, *Driver: LA Undercover* is far more impressive. Its third-person perspective doesn't look at all bad, at least in terms of its polygon cities. Its sprite-scaled vehicles, less so. But its gameplay is a big step up from its predecessor. There are missions straight out of the core titles, such as shooting down other vehicles from the driver's seat, racing to checkpoints against the clock and pulling off stunts. It all feels a bit clunky, however, which leaves you wondering if it was worth bringing *Driver* to Java in the first place.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

DRIVER: SPEEDBOAT PARADISE

THE SMARTPHONE SPEEDBOAT RACER



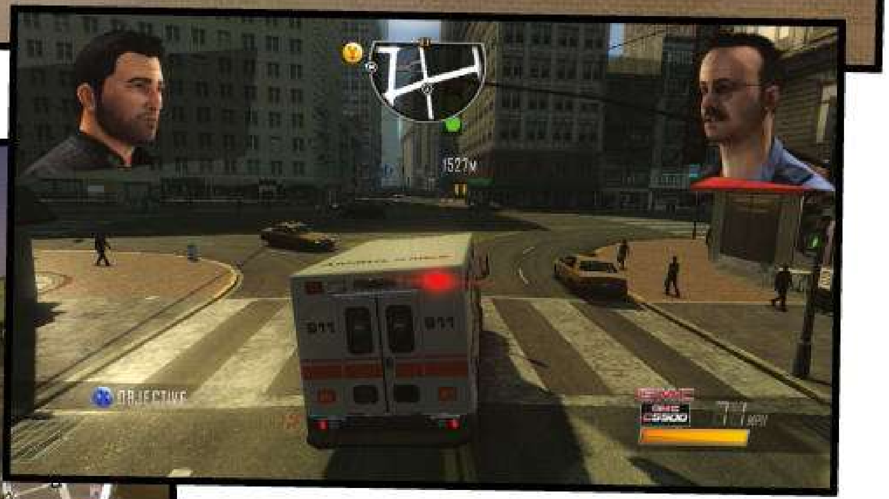
There are similarities between the approaches taken by ***Speedboat Paradise*** and the earlier ***Driver*** title ***Renegade 3D***. More specifically, each game takes a single aspect of the ***Driver*** series and runs with it – combat in ***Renegade 3D***'s case, speedboat challenges in the case of ***Speedboat Paradise***.

There's a lot that could be said about the latter title's controversial in-app purchases, but as the game's servers have been shut down there's no point. Of more interest is the fact that ***Speedboat Paradise*** is a lot of fun to play.

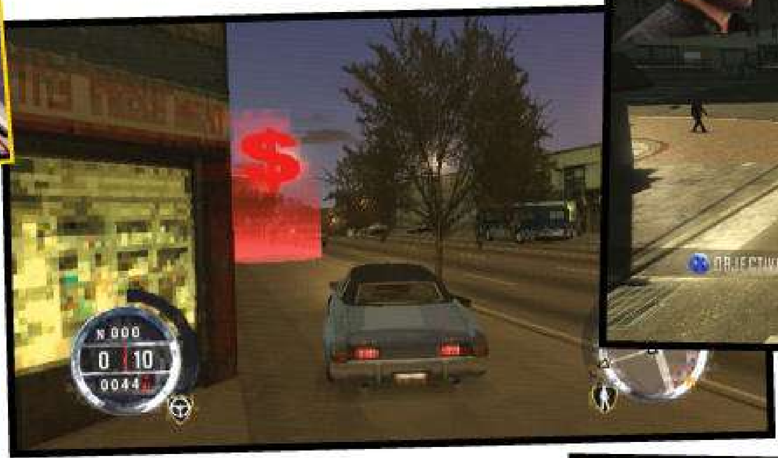
The focus is on taking part in races for in-game money, which you then upgrade your boat with. The spin that makes the game feel like a ***Driver*** title is that your opponents are criminals, and your mission is to take out as many as possible while you race. The key to doing this is collecting on-course nitro power-ups, which allow you to reach crazy speeds and ram your competitors' rides. In another nod to ***Driver: Renegade 3D***, direct hits cause their boats to explode, and of course doing so improves your chances of placing highly in races. This in turn unlocks boss-fights, which involve chasing after bosses and duelling on the open waves.

Between the missions there are some quite forgettable non-player characters that give you advice, and appearances from series protagonist Tanner, who explains the crime-busting aspect of the challenges.

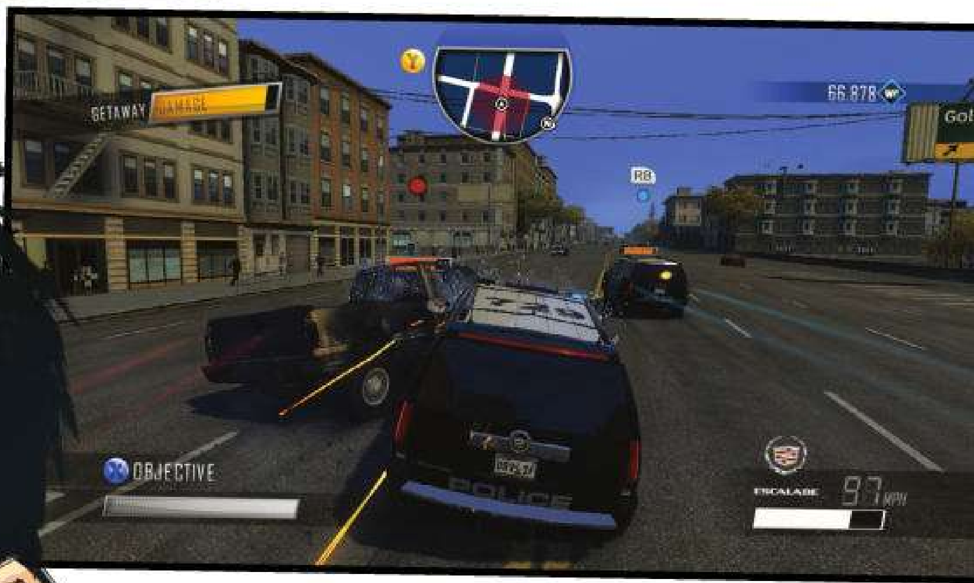
» [PS2] The muscle cars in the Seventies-set half of *Driver: Parallel Lines* really help it recreate the decade.



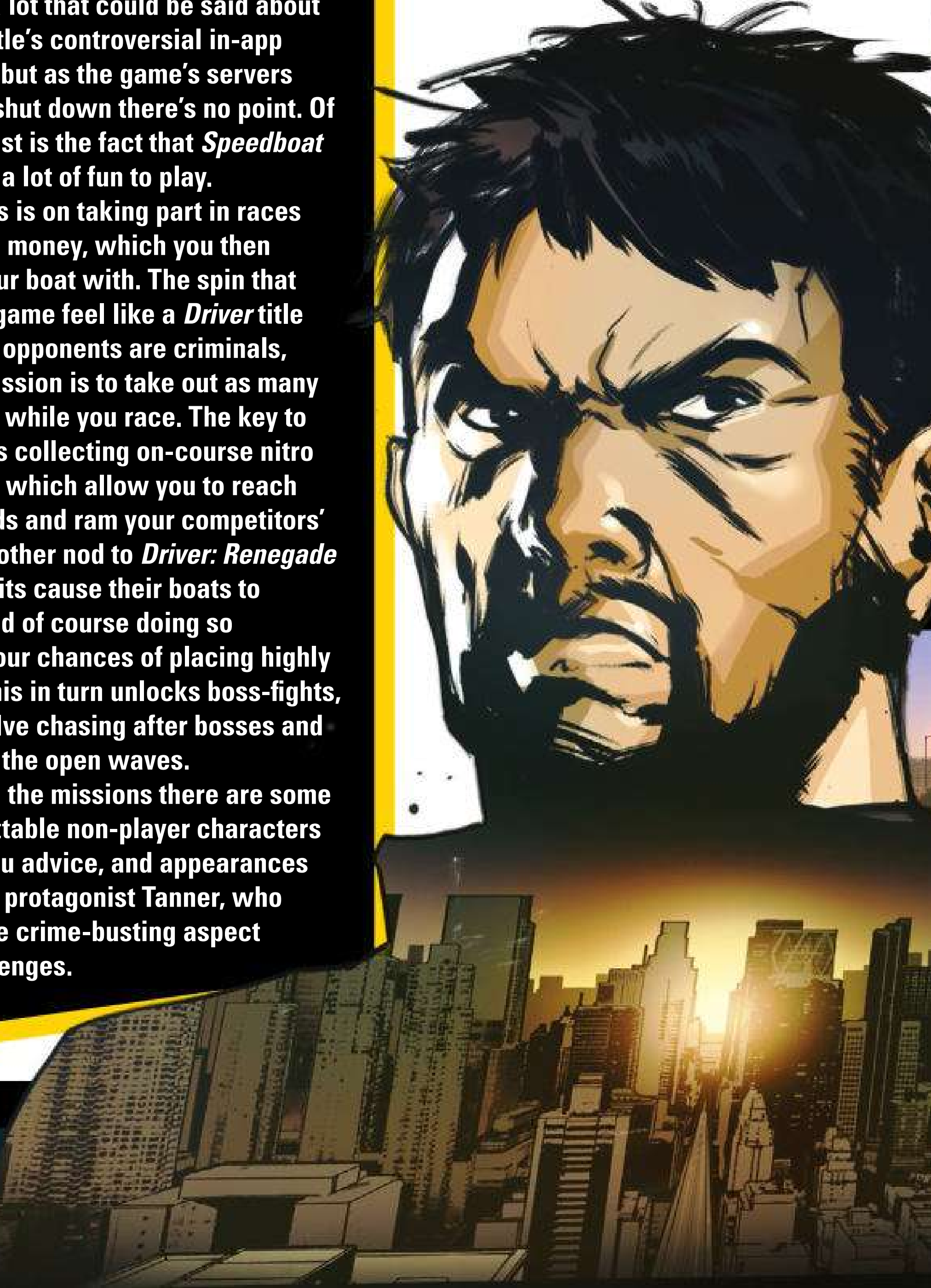
» [PC] Minutes into *Driver: San Francisco*, Tanner is seemingly driving his unconscious self to the hospital.

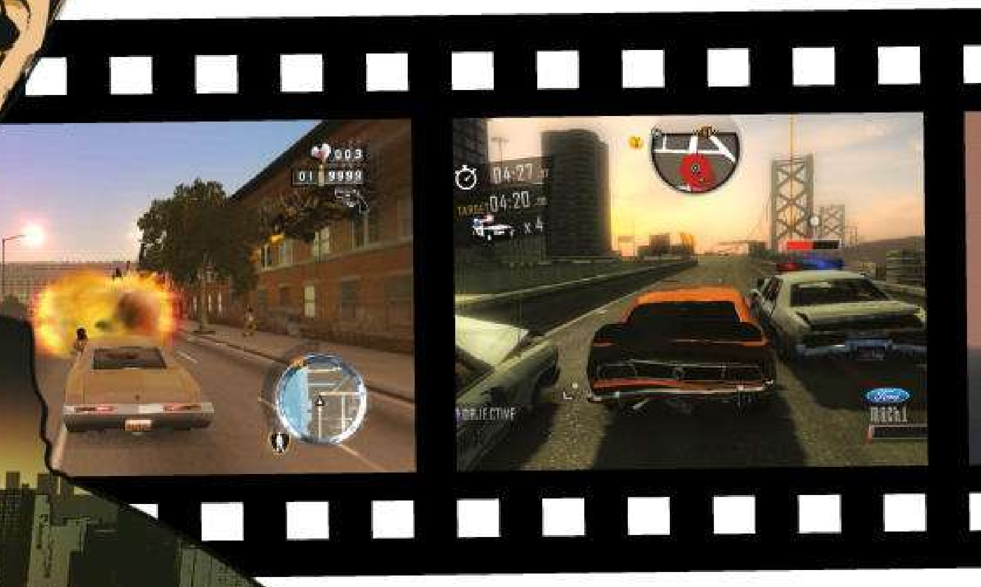


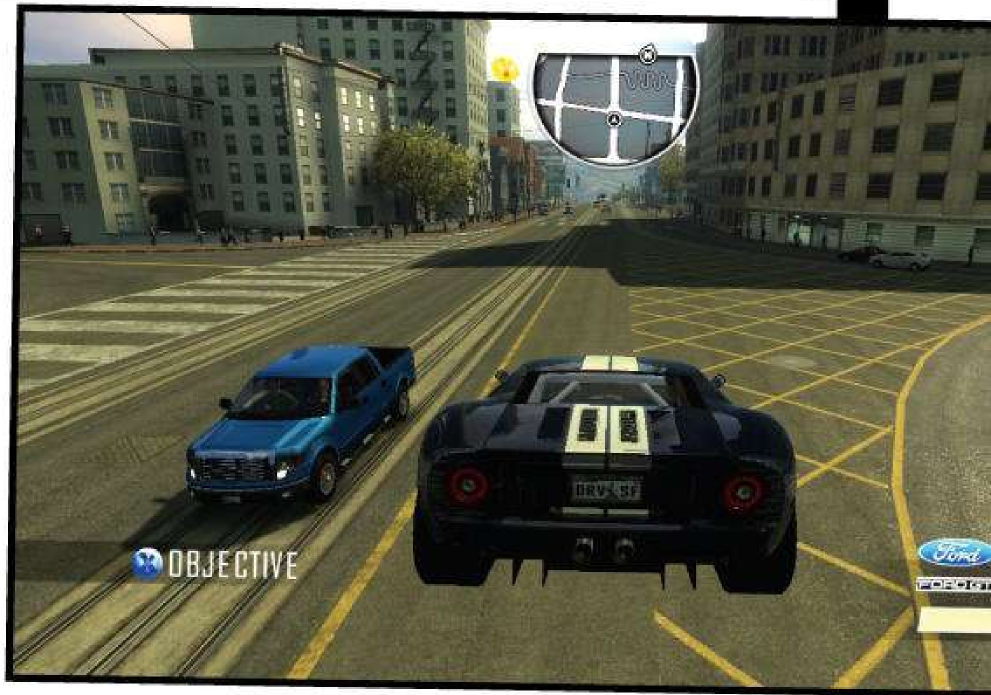
» [PS2] Earning cash in side-missions to upgrade vehicles is an important aspect of *Driver: Parallel Lines*.



» [PC] Taking over and swapping between other driver's bodies is an essential skill in *Driver: San Francisco*.







» [PC] Tanner wakes from his coma in *Driver: San Francisco* by building-up Willpower awarded for performing stunts.

earning cash on the side between missions by entering races and committing petty crimes to order. “We had always had little things going on at the side, like taxi missions where you picked people up and took them places,” Martin says of the earlier *Driver* titles. “That was part of really early discussions in even *Driver 2* and *Driv3r* about doing that, so it would have been at the point of *Parallel Lines* that we decided to actually go for it. I wasn’t involved in the implementation, so I can’t really put much concrete on it, but there were definitely conversations around giving you that extra freedom.”

Yet more freedom was incorporated into *Parallel Lines* in the form of being able to shoot out of the window while behind the wheel, which had become an option thanks to changing attitudes. “We decided we were going to allow you to shoot from the car because being careful about shooting due to age ratings wasn’t a massive issue anymore,” Martin recalls. “Also, in many films you had characters driving along and shooting machine guns out of the window. It gave more variety too, because we could have missions where you were driving, being chased, delivering, avoiding collisions and now shooting out of your car as well.”

Widely considered to be superior to its predecessor, *Parallel Lines* was applauded for its imaginative narrative. The subsequent *Driver* title – *Driver: San Francisco* – had Martin back on board as director and regular series protagonist Tanner in a coma. “We designed that concept to support a mechanic where you instantaneously changed vehicles,” Martin says of the hero’s hospitalisation. “So not getting out of the car and running, but ‘zapping’ between cars. At first it felt really strange, until you realised the game was playing out in Tanner’s head while he was in hospital. But it gave us a load of flexibility, because we could do some really crazy things with the gameplay. Then towards the end of the game we brought in a vignette with hospital sounds and imagery, so that things started to make sense.”

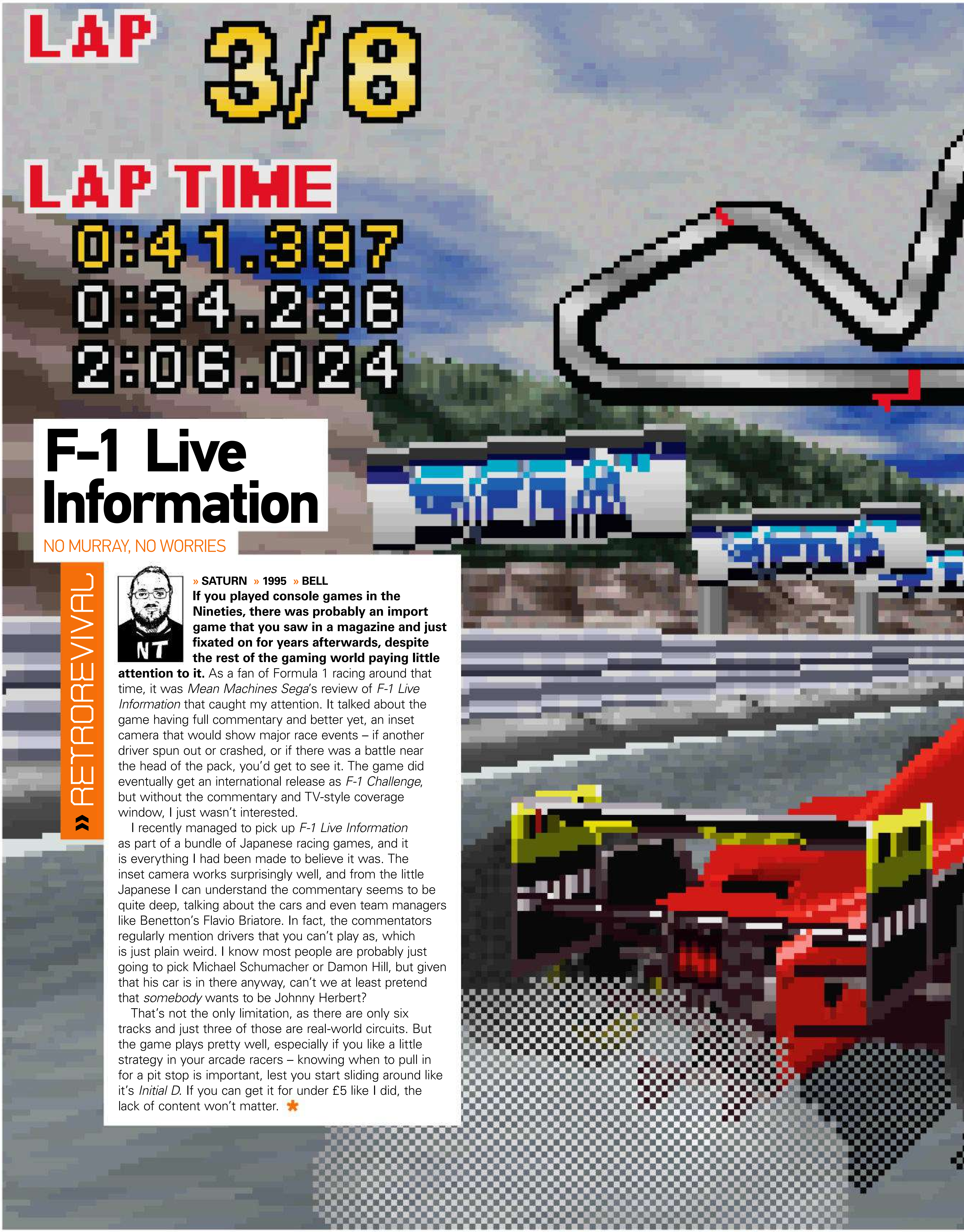
Naturally, given the series that *Driver: San Francisco* belonged to, the method used to heal Tanner involved completing missions, each of which got you Willpower points. “We had to have routes for players to take through the game, and some way to measure that, but the idea behind Willpower was really Tanner repairing his mind,” Martin clarifies. “He damages it in the crash at the very beginning of the game, but he doesn’t realise because he’s in a coma. So he’s dreaming, but as he gradually recovers he becomes stronger mentally. He does this by pushing himself to do these missions while he’s dreaming, and it brings him further towards getting out of the coma.”

In real life, comas aren’t funny, but as Tanner’s coma allowed him to not just switch vehicles in his dreams but also inhabit their drivers’ bodies the scope for humour was endless. “There was a massive opportunity there,” Martin beams. “With the previous *Driver* games we could have made them funny if we wanted to, although it wasn’t exactly screaming in your face that they could be amusing. But the fact that Tanner might now be sat in the middle of a driving lesson, for example, would have been such a shame not to make light of. All the other stuff too – like the other characters finding out that the person they were driving with had suddenly gone crazy, and was doing all this stuff!”

> **“WE HAD TO HAVE ROUTES THROUGH THE GAME, AND SOME WAY TO MEASURE THAT, BUT THE IDEA BEHIND ‘WILLPOWER’ WAS REALLY TANNER REPAIRING HIS MIND”**
> **MARTIN EDMONDSON**

More humour followed with *Driver: San Francisco*’s Movie Challenges, which were a dream come true for silver screen car chase fans and a call back to the first *Driver* title’s origins. “The *Driver* series was a nod to every car chase movie ever made, so we wanted those to be acknowledged as an influence,” Martin reflects. “If you didn’t know the films it didn’t really matter, because they were still a challenge. We included *Blues Brothers* just because it had an amazing car chase in it where they smashed up 150 police cars. The film wasn’t really about car chases, but it did happen to have the daftest ones in it. Like when they were driving around a supermarket!”

When it hit shop shelves, *Driver: San Francisco* reviewed better than any other game in the series except for the original. Martin still rates *Driver*’s gameplay, but would like a reboot to more accurately mirror the movies that inspired it in the first place. “I still have very fond memories of *Driver*, because it was a number of firsts,” Martin considers. “You got to drive around an open-world city, but also the vehicle handling aspect – I think we did a nice job on that. For future *Driver* games, I’d like to up the realism level to something indistinguishable from a movie, so you’re totally immersed, and the damage to cars would be like real life. You’d struggle with gameplay if you had that level of realism, but it’s certainly a game that I’d like to play.” *



F-1 Live Information

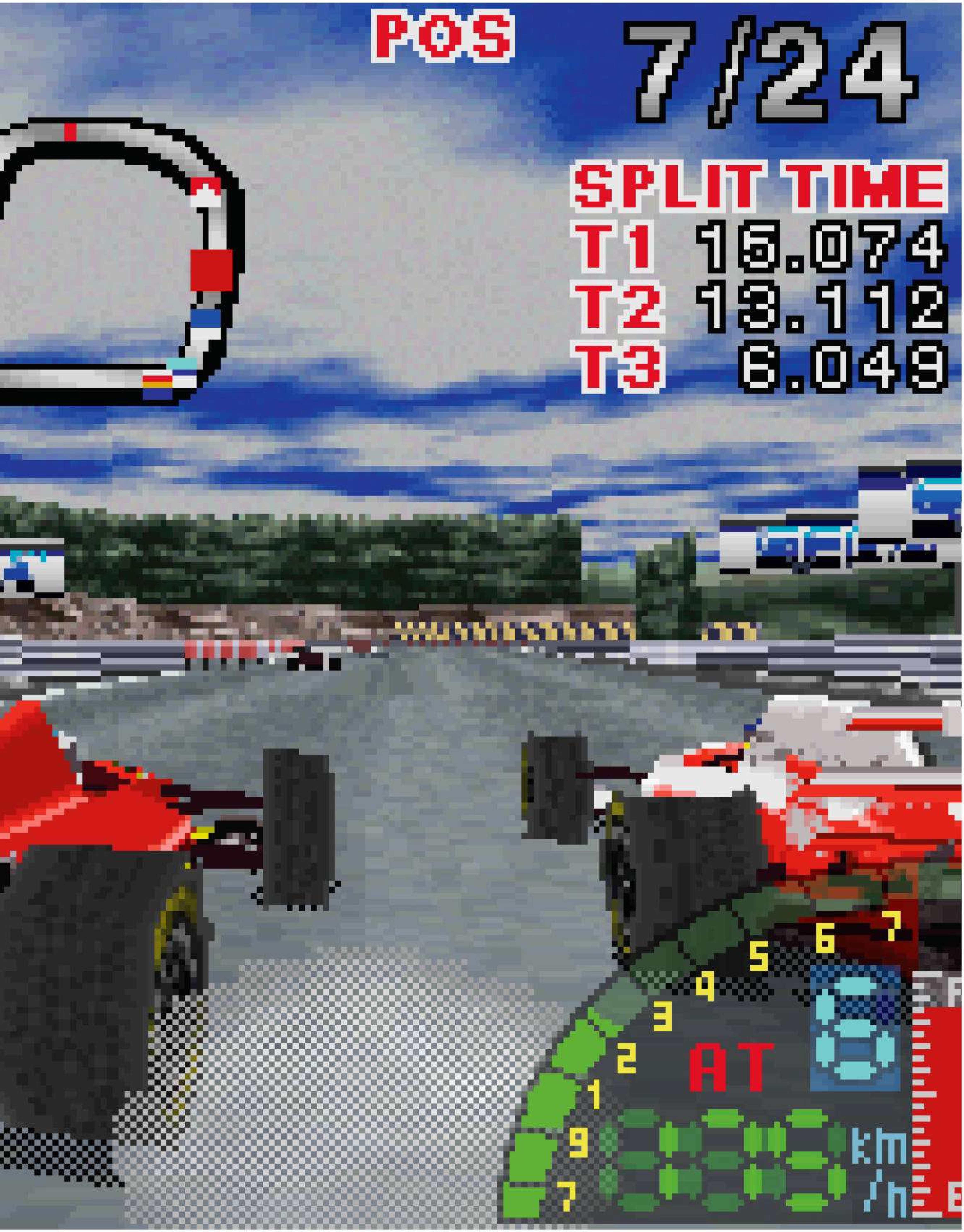
NO MURRAY, NO WORRIES

» SATURN » 1995 » BELL

If you played console games in the Nineties, there was probably an import game that you saw in a magazine and just fixated on for years afterwards, despite the rest of the gaming world paying little attention to it. As a fan of Formula 1 racing around that time, it was *Mean Machines Sega*'s review of *F-1 Live Information* that caught my attention. It talked about the game having full commentary and better yet, an inset camera that would show major race events – if another driver spun out or crashed, or if there was a battle near the head of the pack, you'd get to see it. The game did eventually get an international release as *F-1 Challenge*, but without the commentary and TV-style coverage window, I just wasn't interested.

I recently managed to pick up *F-1 Live Information* as part of a bundle of Japanese racing games, and it is everything I had been made to believe it was. The inset camera works surprisingly well, and from the little Japanese I can understand the commentary seems to be quite deep, talking about the cars and even team managers like Benetton's Flavio Briatore. In fact, the commentators regularly mention drivers that you can't play as, which is just plain weird. I know most people are probably just going to pick Michael Schumacher or Damon Hill, but given that his car is in there anyway, can't we at least pretend that *somebody* wants to be Johnny Herbert?

That's not the only limitation, as there are only six tracks and just three of those are real-world circuits. But the game plays pretty well, especially if you like a little strategy in your arcade racers – knowing when to pull in for a pit stop is important, lest you start sliding around like it's *Initial D*. If you can get it for under £5 like I did, the lack of content won't matter. ✱


POS
7/24
SPLIT TIME
T1 15.074
T2 13.112
T3 6.049
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km/h

THE MAKING OF NET fighter

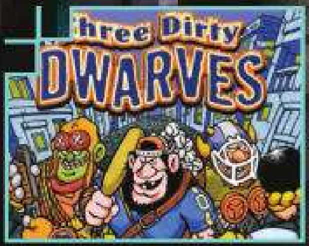
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGASOFT
- » **DEVELOPER:** SYROX
- » **RELEASED:** 1998
- » **PLATFORM:** PC
- » **GENRE:** FIGHTING

» Erik wasn't afraid to use his martial arts training to help capture the moves.

NET FIGHTER HAS THE PROUD ACCOLADE OF BEING THE WORLD'S FIRST ONLINE-ONLY FIGHTING GAME. THIS AMBITIOUS SEGASOFT TITLE IS NOW SADLY FORGOTTEN, HOWEVER, ITS IMPACT ON SHAKING UP A VERY SATURATED GENRE IN THE LATE-NINETIES CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED

WORDS BY ADRIAN WALLETT

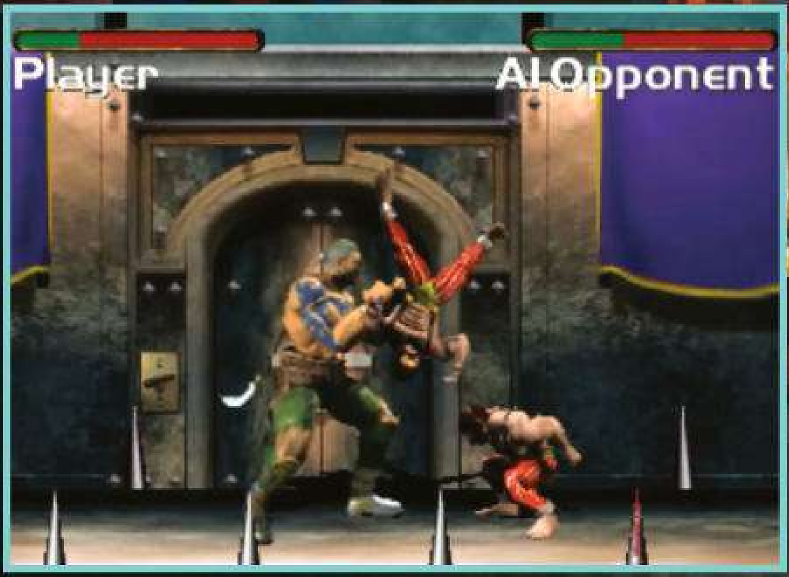


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

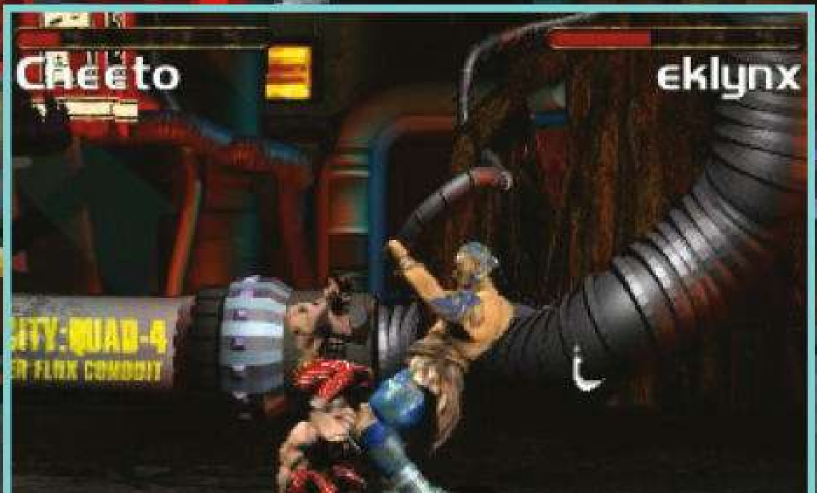
BUG TOO!
SYSTEM: SATURN, PC
YEAR: 1997

THREE DIRTY DWARVES (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SATURN, PC
YEAR: 1997

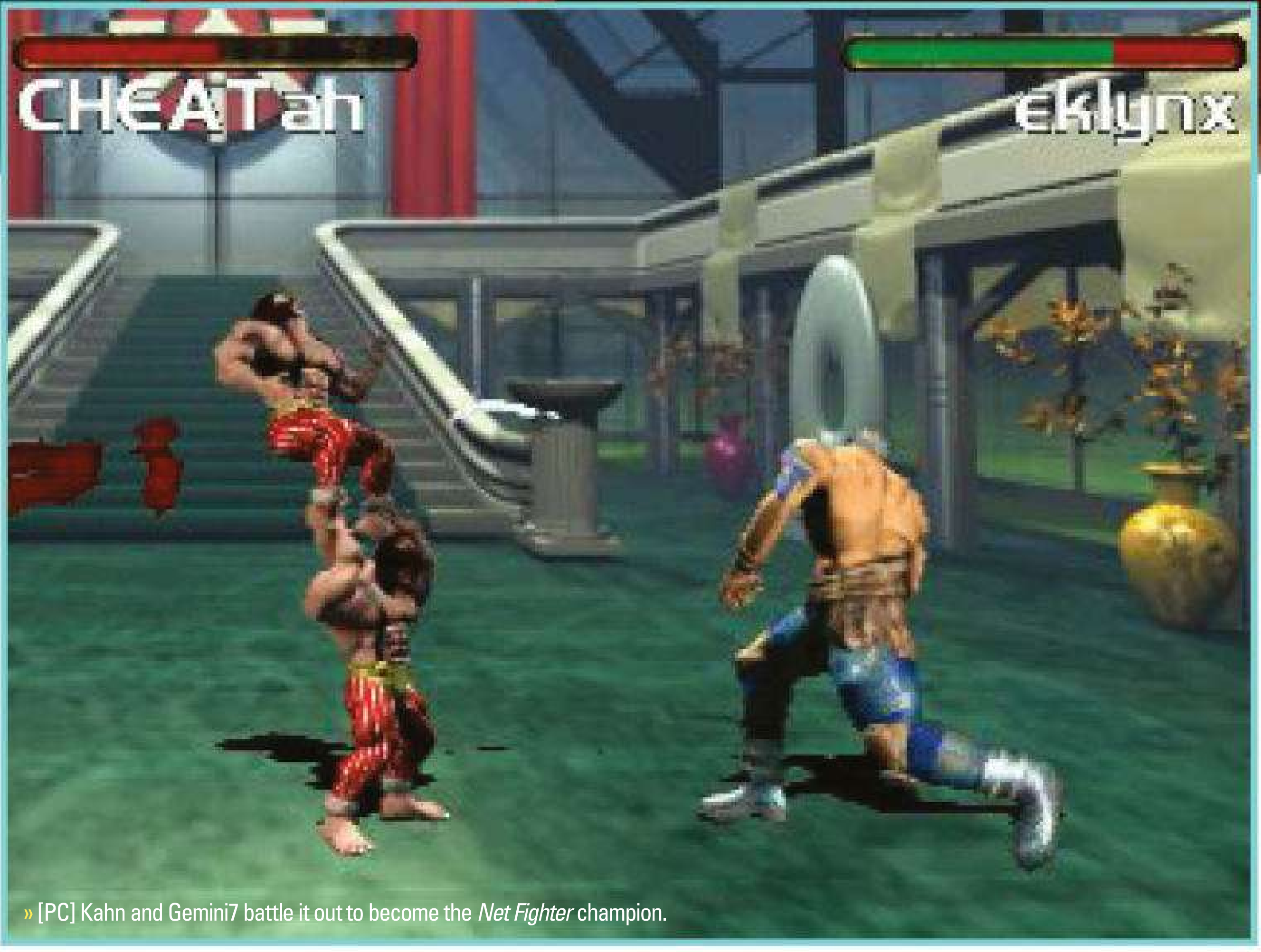
FLESH FEAST
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1998



» [PC] Gemini7 prove that teamwork makes the dream work!



» [PC] Kahn strikes a low blow to his opponent with his powerful groin strike.



» [PC] Kahn and Gemini7 battle it out to become the *Net Fighter* champion.

The one-on-one fighting genre had become oversaturated by the mid-Nineties and it was easy to accuse many of them of simply being a *Mortal Kombat* clone or a dodgy 3D fighter with poor hit detection. SegaSoft's *Net Fighter* aimed to buck that trend with an ambitious and potentially groundbreaking concept; to become the world's first online-only fighting game. SegaSoft deserves credit for such a bold undertaking, but *Net Fighter* sadly seems to have been forgotten within the gaming world. Now seems like the right time to dust off the gi, take up the crane kick position and get the inside story on this ambitious release.

SegaSoft was created back in 1996 with the intention of publishing games on both Sega hardware platforms and PC. Erik Wahlberg was a producer at Sega at the time and quickly got involved. "I was working for Michael Latham on the Omega production team at the time, and the entire production team was invited to join," he says. The move gave Erik mixed feelings though. "To be honest, I was a bit sad leaving Sega, but SegaSoft was supposed to publish Sega games so there was still a strong connection. Or, so I was told," he says. "A year or so later our executive team changed the strategy. We would instead release PC and internet games only and focus on our online-gaming service, HEAT.net."

With the growth of the internet and the vast opportunities this could bring to the gaming industry the decision did make sense as Erik explains. "HEAT.net needed a library of exclusive online-only games, and I was in Michael's office one day talking about PVP fighting games on the internet (unheard of at the time due to the slow and unpredictable internet speed of modems). 'You think we could do it?' Mike asked. By 'we' he meant us and our favourite UK developer, Syrox." Erik had already racked up a lot of experience working on fighting games in the past for Sega such as *Eternal Champions* and *Virtua Fighter*, this seemed like a challenge, but one he was willing to take on. "I thought we could use clever design approaches and with experience working on the fighting system for *Eternal Champions* on the Sega CD, I felt confident. I said, 'Yeah! Let's do it!' It was quickly greenlit. I was given full autonomy to concept and design the game with Syrox and Phil Harvey, their talented lead engineer. Fortunately, I also had an amazing assistant producer, Dave Gray, who helped with the technical design."

Net Fighter would be made with a small budget and an even smaller team as Erik reflects. "I was the producer and lead designer. The legendary Dave Gray was my assistant, and then Syrox did the engineering and art. We had other audio and production and marketing support but that was the team. I would guess no more than four to six Syrox developers worked on the game. We had a very small budget and a short development cycle."

The toughest part of developing *Net Fighter* would prove, unsurprisingly, to be the online-play mechanics as Erik recalls. "The aim was to get a game running and playing on a 28.8 and even 14.4 modem. We did and early versions were encouraging." Matches in fighting games are often won through split-second movements and reactions, something Erik had to tackle face on. "Modems were laughably slow for such a twitch-based player-vs-player game. Managing inconsistent delivery and reception of packets of data was the core tech challenge. There was a big focus on addressing this by clever design."

Erik proudly remembers one particularly ingenious way of overcoming such slow speeds. "If you pressed an attack key there would be a slight delay in the move

▶

FEELING THE HEAT

JOINING HEAT.NET WAS THE ONLY WAY TO PLAY NET FIGHTER

■ HEAT.net was an online PC gaming system produced by SegaSoft. Customers would pay on average $5 a month for their membership fee. HEAT.net rewarded players by the number of hours they played and awarded them with an in-game currency known as Degrees. Degrees could be spent on a small selection of games, computer-related items and even magazine subscriptions. This loyalty scheme led to several players simply logging in to the server and accumulating Degrees while they were sleeping. Players could easily make around $4 a day through this sly behaviour and then spend it online. One way HEAT.net aimed to tackle this behaviour was by appointing a team of 'parking police', where they would go around gaming rooms looking for static and non-playing customers. The last throw of the dice to save HEAT.net was to lower the value of Degrees by 80%, but it proved to be too little, too late. The platform failed and closed in the year 2000 due to financial difficulties and lack of demand.

HEAT.NET
FAST FREE ONLINE GAMING

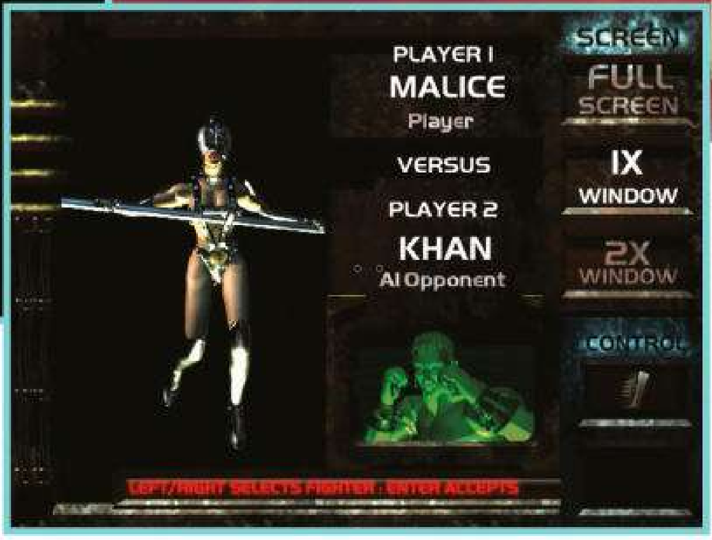
Harry
Erik
Greg
jockey dude...
Kim
John
Dave

» The team behind *Net Fighter*, including Erik Wahlberg (second from left).

> "MODEMS WERE LAUGHABLY SLOW FOR SUCH A TWITCH-BASED PLAYER-VS-PLAYER GAME. MANAGING INCONSISTENT DELIVERY AND RECEPTION OF PACKETS OF DATA WAS THE CORE TECH CHALLENGE"
> **ERIK WAHLBERG**

THE FIGHTERS

» [PC] *Net Fighter's* servers have long shut down, which has made it hard to procure screenshots.



» [PC] Malice's outfit probably wouldn't be allowed in today's society.

starting, but the notification to the other player's CPU would be sent immediately, giving the defender's CPU a head start." And it didn't stop there. "Furthermore, the attack animation had more frames of animation on the attacker's side than the defender's. This allowed for, and even counted on, the delay that would happen using modems. There were many other tricks, even a crazy time jump animation that would allow for health bars to be adjusted for massive packet loss."

Net Fighter couldn't just rely on being the world's first online-only fighting game though. It needed solid gameplay, smooth animation, impressive graphics and controls that would be intuitive for mid-Nineties PC users at the time, as Erik explains. "The game had some memorable characters, special moves, cool combos and brutal finishing moves, but that's not unique. I did, however, design the game to be easy to play and accessible for new players on a keyboard. The chain combos were easy to pull off, as were the Fatalities. I would also say it was very accessible." *Net Fighter* took on several key features from other popular fighting games. "The gameplay was a combination of the most popular game mechanics and features of the time, with a focus on making the game casual". It had a look similar to *Killer Instinct*, special moves not unlike *Street Fighter*, a chain combo system like *Tekken*, and finishing moves like *Mortal Kombat*." However, this wasn't a deliberate consideration when the game was being developed. "The funny thing is, this wasn't necessarily the intention when designing the game. We sought to make the game functional and fun. If anything, it shows how each of those fighting games have compelling features."

***Net Fighter* used real martial artists to help make the game as accurate and authentic as possible.** Something Erik is incredibly proud to be involved with. "We used real-life fighting styles that I choreographed and recorded using real black belts and fighters. I used my martial arts connections and went to various gyms and dojos, and we recorded them doing the choreographed moves. Gemini7 is the exception being two acrobatic little people. I didn't have access to that!"

Gemini7 certainly stands out within the game's roster of characters. You control a pair of dwarf clones, created in a special project known as the Gemini Experiment. Erik admits that this unique pairing was his favourite. "Gemini was fun because of their 'co-operative fighting' animations". Erik also has special admiration for Kahn, *Net Fighter*'s fiercest character. "I like Khan because of his fighting style and cool ponytail chain/blade combo, but honestly because each of the fighting styles and moves are based on real fighting that I choreographed. I love playing them all!"

Players wouldn't need to buy a physical copy to play *Net Fighter*, instead, they had to sign up to HEAT.net to start playing. "The reason we made this game was to be an exclusive and unique title a player could only play on HEAT.net," says Erik. "It was online-only, and we didn't have a one-player mode. Like all online gaming services of the time a player would sign-up, select the game, match with a random or specific player and fight. Erik admits that even though the game was complete, it was far from perfect. "The game was pretty bare-bones. Just join, match up and fight. That being said, players who liked the game really liked it. Fighting games were still hot and playing online was a new and exciting experience for some."

One reason *Net Fighter* wasn't a mainstream hit was that it relied on the popularity of HEAT.net, the online platform gamers would need to sign up for as Erik reflects "The game could only be as successful as the platform, and at the end of the day HEAT.net didn't reach critical mass and failed. That meant *Net Fighter* could not succeed." The original intention was for *Net Fighter* to have a second iteration (more features, characters and online hooks) but SegaSoft was very light on funds by the time Net Fighter came out. "We never had the chance to improve upon it." Erik laments. "In my opinion, *Net Fighter* was more of a demo than an actual game. For being so basic

> "I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT IF THIS GAME HAD A REAL GAME BUDGET, WITH A REALISTIC SCHEDULE AND WAS AVAILABLE OUTSIDE OF OUR ONLINE GAMING SERVICE, PEOPLE WOULD KNOW OF AND TALK ABOUT IT"
> ERIK WAHLBERG

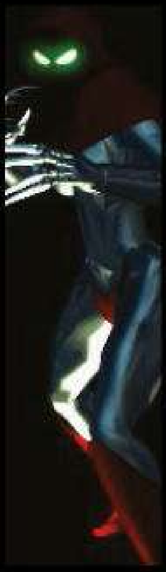
THE BRAWLERS OF NET FIGHTER

KHAN

■ Khan is regarded as the strongest and fiercest character in the game. His fighting style is best described as Pit Fighting, using his simple yet brutal attacks to defeat his foes. Even though he was banished from his tribe, he fights to bring glory to his tribe and one day become chieftain.

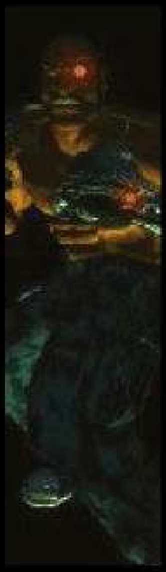
GEMINI7

■ Possibly the oddest character (or should that be two?!) within the game, Gemini7 are a pair of dwarf clones that were specially bred to work as a fearsome team, as part of a secret military operation. Luckily, they escaped and found work in the Circus Of Freaks, later to take part in the *Net Fighter* tournaments.



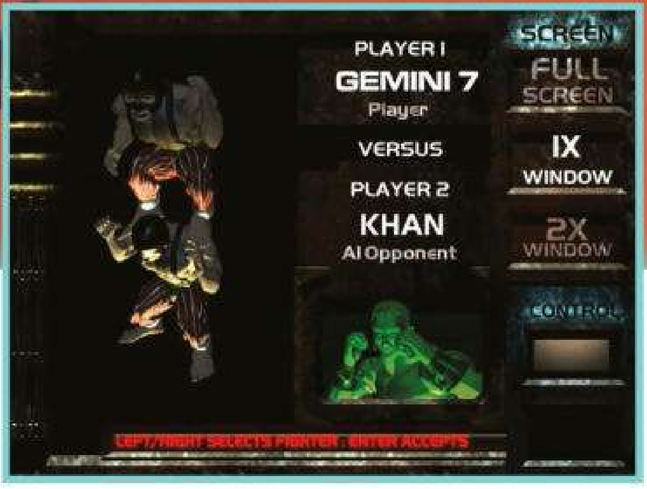
RIPPER

■ Little is known about the mysterious, but aptly named, Ripper. Her fighting style is known as Kenpo, which incorporates fast direct attacks and agility, making her a wily opponent. With her razor-sharp claws and metallic skin, she is certainly a fighter to be feared when she enters the arena.



PHREAK

■ Phreak can boast the skills of being a phone hacker, kickboxer and musician. This cyborg may come across jovial and funny, but deep down he is one of the meanest fighters in the tournament. His unpredictable and wide-ranging combat skills makes him a fighter that will challenge his opposition.


PLAYER 1
GEMINI 7
Player
VERSUS
PLAYER 2
KHAN
AI Opponent
SCREEN
FULL SCREEN
1X WINDOW
2X WINDOW
CONTROL
LEFT/RIGHT SELECTS FIGHTER · ENTER ACCEPTS

» [PC] Gemini7 surely are a contender for being one of fighting games' most original characters.

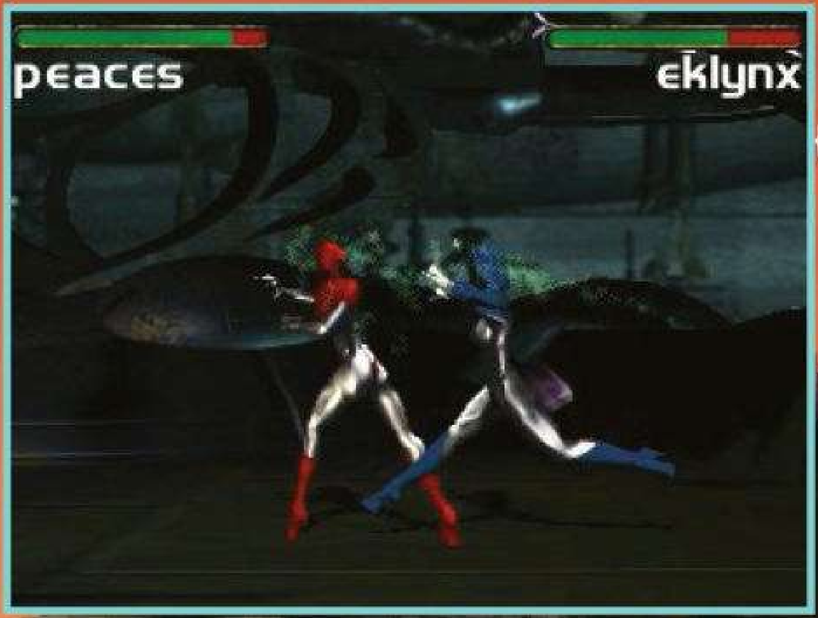
and devoid of game modes or features it was probably as popular as it could be."

Net Fighter is officially in the Guinness World Records as being the world's first online fighting game, but could this title have become something much bigger and spanned numerous sequels? "I have no doubt that if this game had a real game budget, with a realistic schedule and was available outside of our online gaming service, people would know of and talk about it," Erik reflects. "It would have played and looked even better, would have had a deeper combat system and plenty of extra features. I'm proud of the work the team did and, wow, getting a Guinness World Record is pretty amazing."

Could we ever see *Net Fighter* rebooted or remastered? Erik doesn't think there is a place in today's gaming landscape. "I don't think there is a place for it now. As much as I like the characters and setting it is not so unique that it is worthy of a reboot. With games like *Street Fighter* playing perfectly online there is not much novelty about it."

Net Fighter may now be largely forgotten, however, its impact on future online fighting games cannot be disputed. So, the next time you perform a Fatality against your mate across the pond or perform a deadly Spinning Bird Kick against your foe living in Australia, raise a glass to the game that helped shape online fighters. ✱

Special thanks to Andrew Borman for providing additional images.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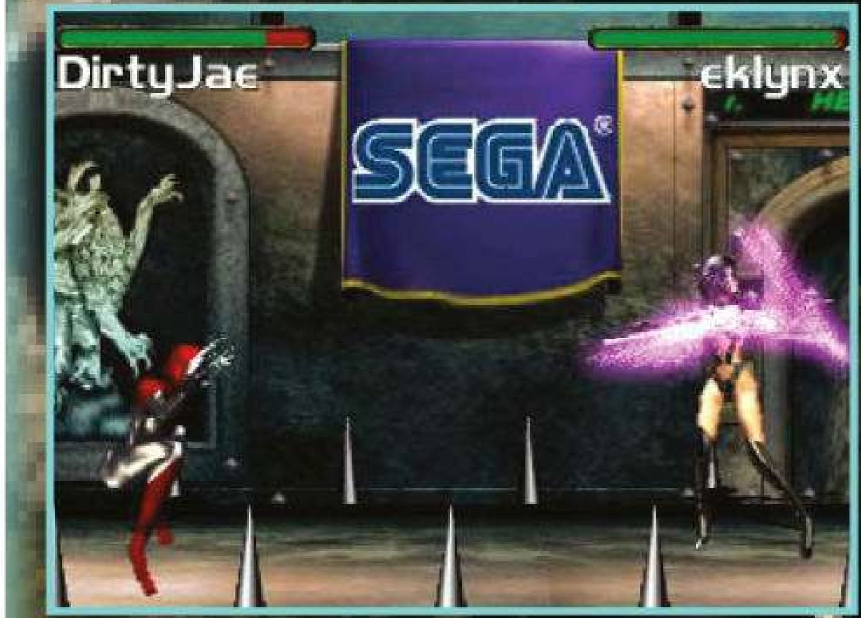
» [PC] Ripper finds her eye of the tiger with her slashing claw.

» [PC] Real-life martial artists were used to create the moves in *Net Fighter.*


DirtyJae
eklynx
SEGA

» [PC] Malice shows off one of her spells with Sega proudly displayed in the background.

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fighter
COMPETE ON HEAT.NET
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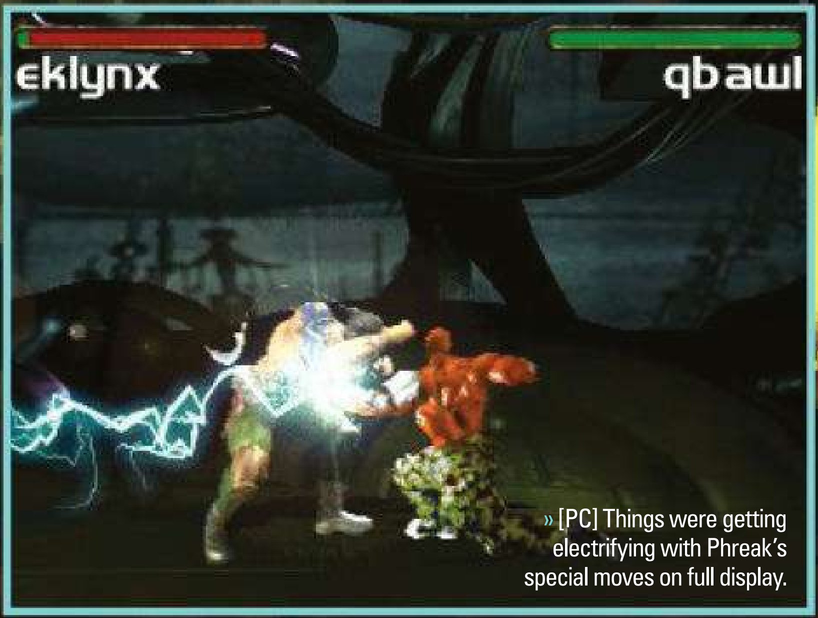
» [PC] At the time, it really was the only fighting game designed for the internet.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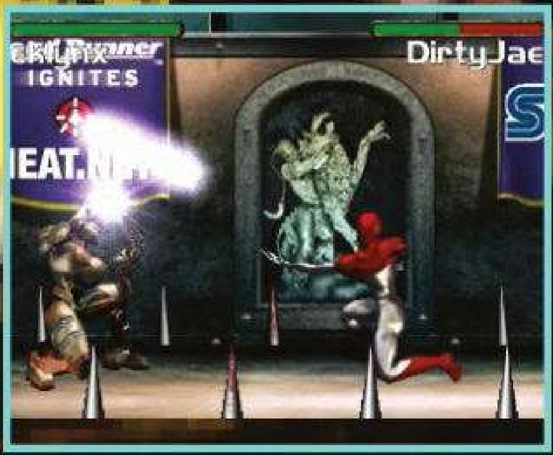
» [PC] Things were getting electrifying with Phreak's special moves on full display.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DirtyJae

» [PC] Psi-Rox shows off his psychic shield move in all its glory.

MEET NET FIGHTER'S MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

MALICE

■ Malice was born blind and has learned how to 'sense' objects around her and fight with astute awareness and great speed. She might sound a bit like Daredevil, but she's also a witch and masochist, and gains wild enjoyment out of pain, making her one of the most vicious fighters in the tournament.

TETSUO

■ Tetsuo is one of the few pure humans in the tournament and boasts solid fighting skills and the heart of a champion. Sadly, one of his arms was ripped from its socket while fighting against the robot Psi-Rox, meaning he now fights with a strong mechanical robotic arm enabling heavy punching strikes.

KRYSTAL

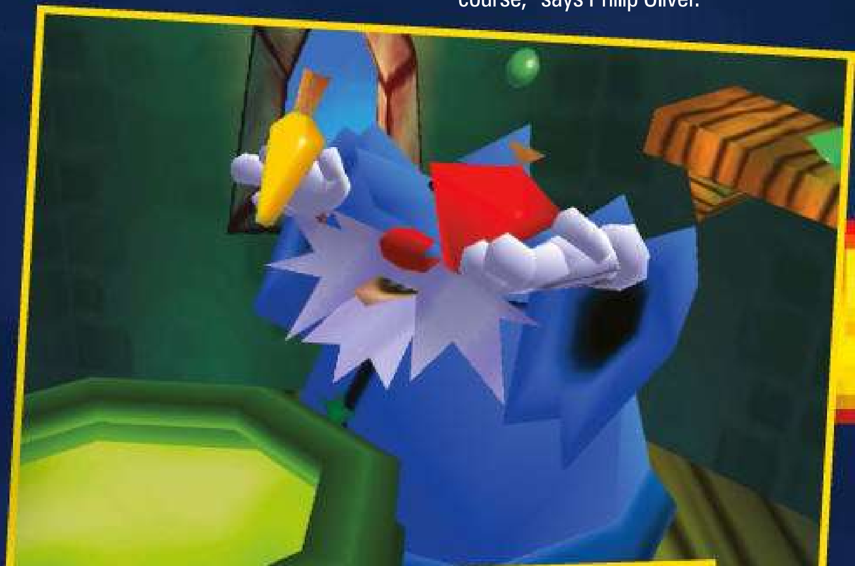
■ Unfortunately, no one knows the true identity of Krystal, not even herself! She awoke in an alleyway after being attacked by a gang of thugs. After unleashing a flurry of devastating attacks on her enemies, she is now on a mission to discover her identity, leading her to fight in the *Net Fighter* tournament.

PSI-ROX

■ Psi-Rox is a killing robot with a psychic brain and brutal strength. He is currently the *Net Fighter* champion, having won the last two tournaments. His fighting style is an acrobatic blend of Aikijutsu and Tae Kwon Do. So be wary of him and his range of devastating attacks.

THE MAKING OF

GLOVER



» [N64] The team pondered what magical event could have brought Glover to life and who was performing the magic. "The obvious answer was a wizard, of course," says Philip Oliver.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** HASBRO INTERACTIVE

» **DEVELOPER:** INTERACTIVE STUDIOS

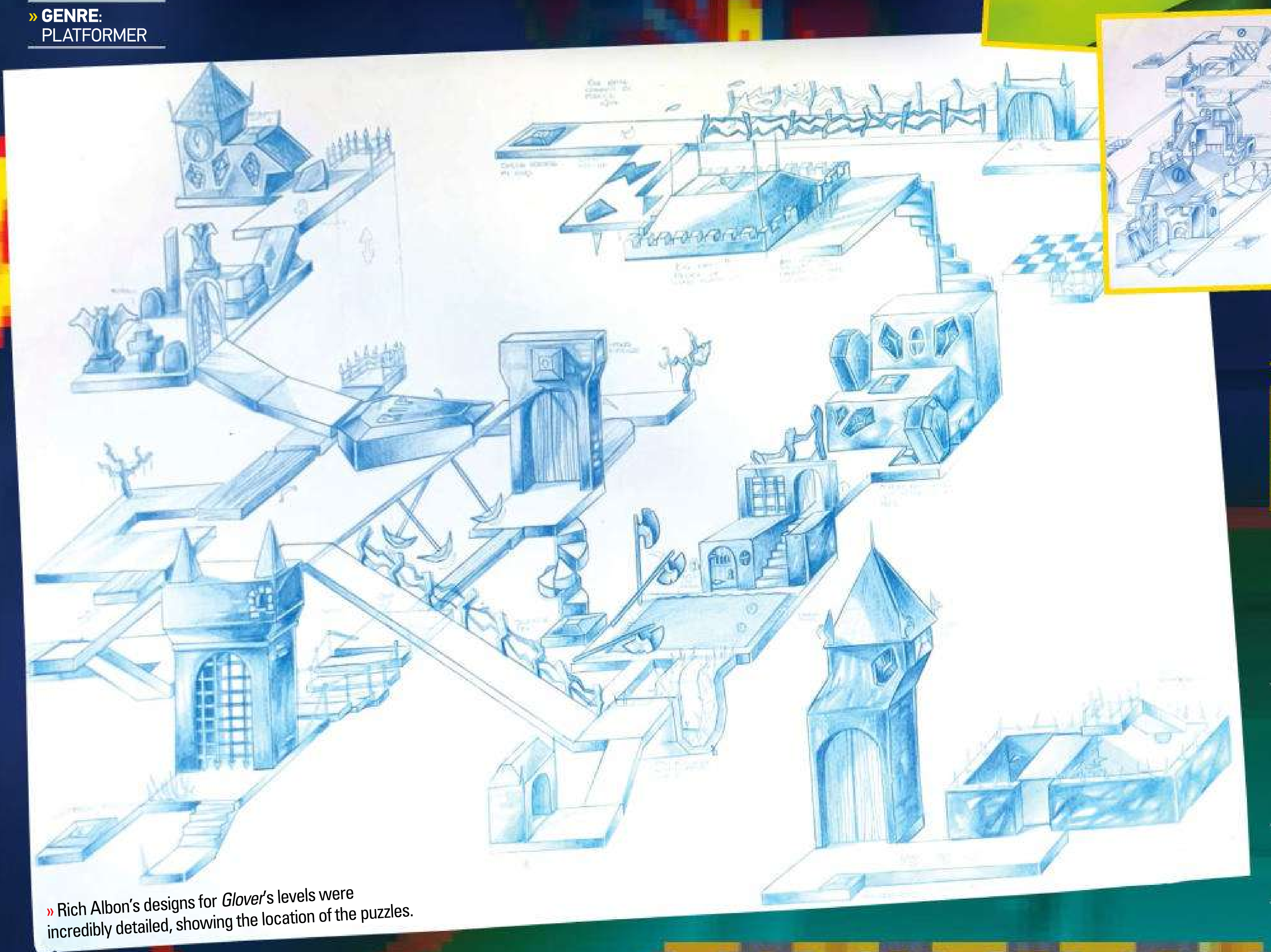
» **RELEASED:** 1998

» **PLATFORM:** NINTENDO 64, PLAYSTATION, PC

» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

YOU'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO THE DEVELOPERS BEHIND GLOVER – THEY SURE KNEW HOW TO CREATE AN INNOVATIVE PLATFORMER. DARREN WOOD, RICH ALBON AND FORMER INTERACTIVE STUDIOS BOSS PHILIP OLIVER DISCUSS THE MONTHS SPENT MAKING GLOVER ON THE NINTENDO 64

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES



» Rich Albon's designs for *Glover*'s levels were incredibly detailed, showing the location of the puzzles.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FIRO & KLAWD
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, PC
YEAR: 1996

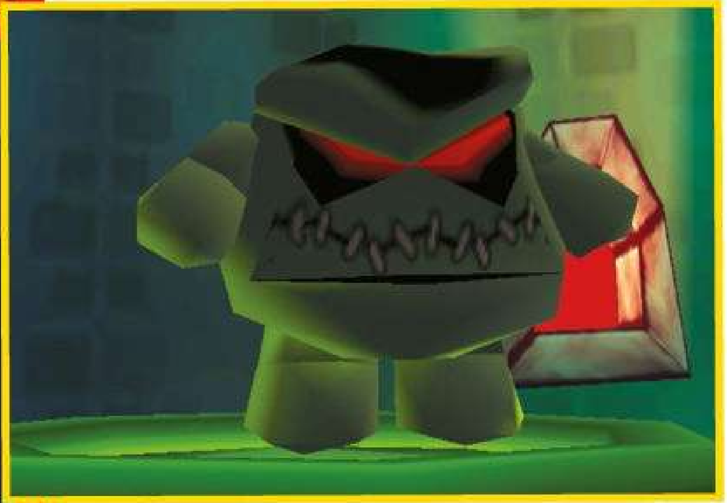
FROGGER 2: SWAMPY'S REVENGE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, PC, DREAMCAST, GAME BOY COLOR
YEAR: 2000

FUZION FRENZY
SYSTEM: XBOX
YEAR: 2001

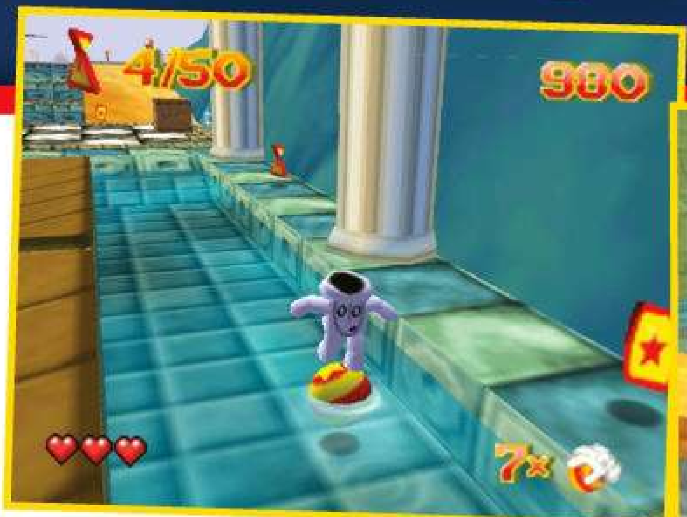
Cast your mind back to 1998 and you may recall it being a rather good year for Nintendo 64 games. Players could enjoy the likes of *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *F-Zero X*. Yet also thrown into that mix was *Glover*, an innovative, quirky adventure with a heavy focus on puzzles. It was easy to overlook given what it was up against yet it proved to be so novel that anyone who played would likely remember it.

Take one look at the screenshots on these pages and you see why. The first thing you can't fail to notice is that, yes, the central character is indeed a glove but, as you play the game, you realise it's not just any old glove. Besides having a pair of eyes and a mouth, Glover walks, jumps and leaps. Crucially, the character can engage with a ball in myriad ways, whether that's by throwing or bouncing, slapping or catching, or even walking on top as it floats on water.

This curious almost buddy-like combo underpins *Glover*'s entire 3D platform experience. Progression through the levels and the solving of puzzles relies heavily on the design of the character and his interaction with the ball. But it appears to have come about through a process of evolution rather than an attempt at revolution! "*Glover* started life as a crazy-golf-inspired game following a visit to Pirates Cove Miniature Golf in Florida," reveals Philip Oliver, the then co-boss of *Glover*'s developer, Interactive Studios.



» [N64] "All good stories need a nemesis and a motivation to confront and stop their evil activities," Philip says, explaining the presence of a bitter enemy.

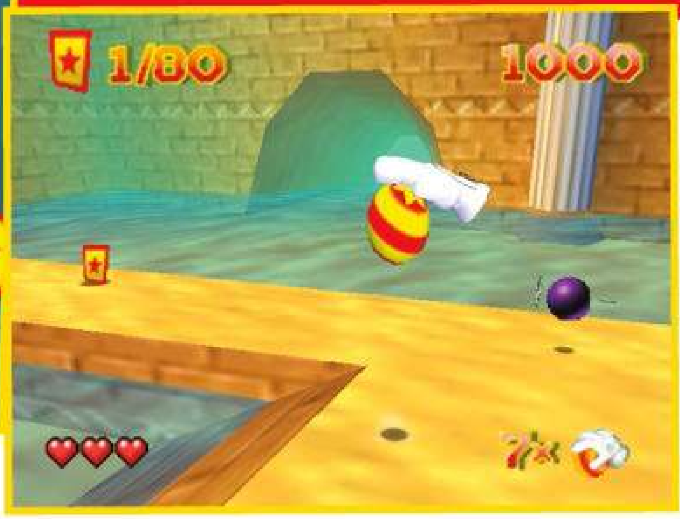


» [N64] There was lots of water in the Atlantis level as well as a fair few secrets to uncover.

At first, the concept was to control a putter hitting a ball towards a hole around various themed courses, as Philip reveals. "We wanted the player to control just the putter. But to give the game more personality, we thought about turning the putter into a character – which, as it turned out, looked terrible.

"We then had the problem that once you hit the ball, it would be frustrating to watch if you knew it wasn't going where you wanted it to go. So, in a discussion over lunch with our producer, we took a tennis ball and said we needed to hit it, chase it, correct its direction, maybe even catch and stop it if it's going really badly wrong. And while we were making hand gestures using our tennis ball, we said, 'Wait, why don't we use this – a hand?' We quickly decided a severed hand wasn't the look we wanted and changed it to a glove that had come alive!"

From that point, the ball rolled, albeit, a little slowly. First, the developers began to think about the environments in which the character could roam. "There was inspiration from games like *Marble Madness* where you had to guide a ball around an environment and solve puzzles along the way," says *Glover*'s team leader Darren Wood. It was also decided that the glove could detach from the ball and become a character in its own right and this was when the game really came into its own.



» [N64] Half the battle in *Glover* was being able to keep control of the ball.

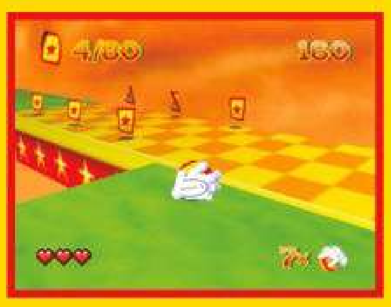
> **"THE GAME WAS ORIGINALLY BEING CALLED WHACK 'N ROLL AND WHEN I STARTED AT THE COMPANY THERE WAS A WORKING PROTOTYPE RUNNING ON PC"**
> **RICH ALBON**

"The game was originally being called *Whack 'N Roll* and when I started at the company there was a working prototype running on PC," says Rich Albon, who ended up working on the concept art as well as character and level design. "Back then, if memory still serves, the hand was fused to the ball and it was not a walking bipedal character. Over time, after lots of input from the entire team, it became a character of its own, able to disconnect and play around in the game world. Buttons became eyes and fingers were legs and arms."

CONVERSION CAPERS

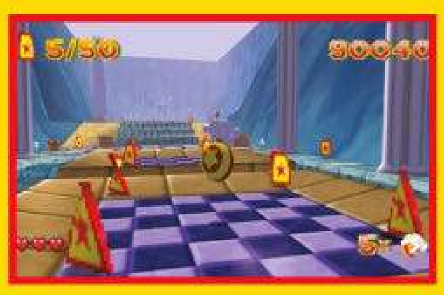
HOW WELL DID THE GLOVE FIT?

NINTENDO 64



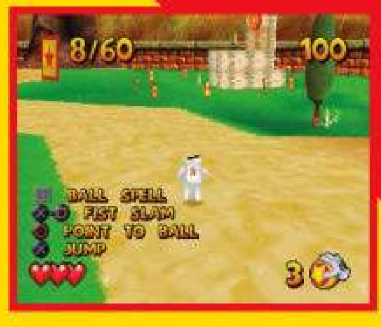
■ *Glover* was originally released on the N64 and PC and this version is widely regarded as being the best. There's no faulting its ambition or innovation and once you get your brain into gear with the controls, the game's wide variety of puzzles and themed levels still prove attractive.

PC



■ A straight port of the N64 game, there is little to distinguish the two – the controls are largely the same although you can also play using the keyboard. Interestingly, the 2022 PC version by Piko Interactive uses the original Nintendo 64 source code with higher-res graphics and a widescreen mode.

PLAYSTATION



■ The PlayStation version came out a year later, boasting a different HUD, a slightly tweaked backstory and graphics that, while having a better draw distance, suffered from an inconsistent framerate and less detail. With long loading times, too, it's well-known for being inferior to the N64 original. Give it a miss.

The developers worked on the prototype for six months. "Having two characters to take care of really expanded the possibilities for gameplay," Darren says. "We also explored a bunch of different puzzles and scenarios that we could build gameplay around for our characters." Slowly but surely, *Glover* took shape.

"The game struggled to find its identity and design in the early days," Philip says. "But once Darren Wood and Steve Bond programmed a small beach demo, that went on to become the opening level, the game started to come together. We became excited to have found a very unique and engaging set of play mechanics to fit a fun and vibrant world."

From the start, the game was earmarked for PC and consoles, notably the Nintendo 64. Interactive Studios was among the first external developers to get its hands on the new N64 developer kits and it was keen to showcase what it could do. Even so, it posed challenges. The dev kits were US NTSC versions running around 30fps and the team needed to import 14-inch CRT NTSC televisions which was no easy feat. Indeed, the kits were so new, the manuals hadn't even been translated into English. "There were no established game or rendering engines back then either," Darren says.

Still, a small team began to build the game with everyone working from an office at Interactive Studios' HQ in Leamington Spa "in a room not much bigger than the average bedroom", as Rich recalls. "At one point, there would have been six or seven of us working on the game in that room and it was fun. Each day, a team member would have the choice of music and every time [3D animator] Dave Manuel's choice came around it was nearly always Kate Bush. We would collectively kick off – all harmless team buddy nonsense."

A lot of early time was spent bouncing ideas around. "We thought of all the different ways you could move a ball through a landscape," Philip says. "Our first level had the beachfront with water and we thought about what would happen to the ball if it hit the water – if it floated, then perhaps the character could jump on to it but maybe it should sink. We also thought we could include an ability to change the ball

» [N64] In the pirate-themed level, you could immediately pick up four Garibs by walking the plank!

"WE BECAME EXCITED TO HAVE FOUND A VERY UNIQUE AND ENGAGING SET OF PLAY MECHANICS TO FIT A FUN AND VIBRANT WORLD"

PHILIP OLIVER

» [N64] Glover could make his way through water but a ball would allow him to float.

GLOVER LOST

A PLANNED SEQUEL NEVER ENJOYED AN OFFICIAL RELEASE

Having also become a close-knit team who worked hard during the day and hit the pubs and restaurants of Leamington Spa at night, the developers who worked on *Glover* agreed to create a sequel. It continued where *Glover* left off and included a multiplayer mode, enhanced graphics and physics as well as new characters. The control system was tweaked and the plot ran throughout the game.

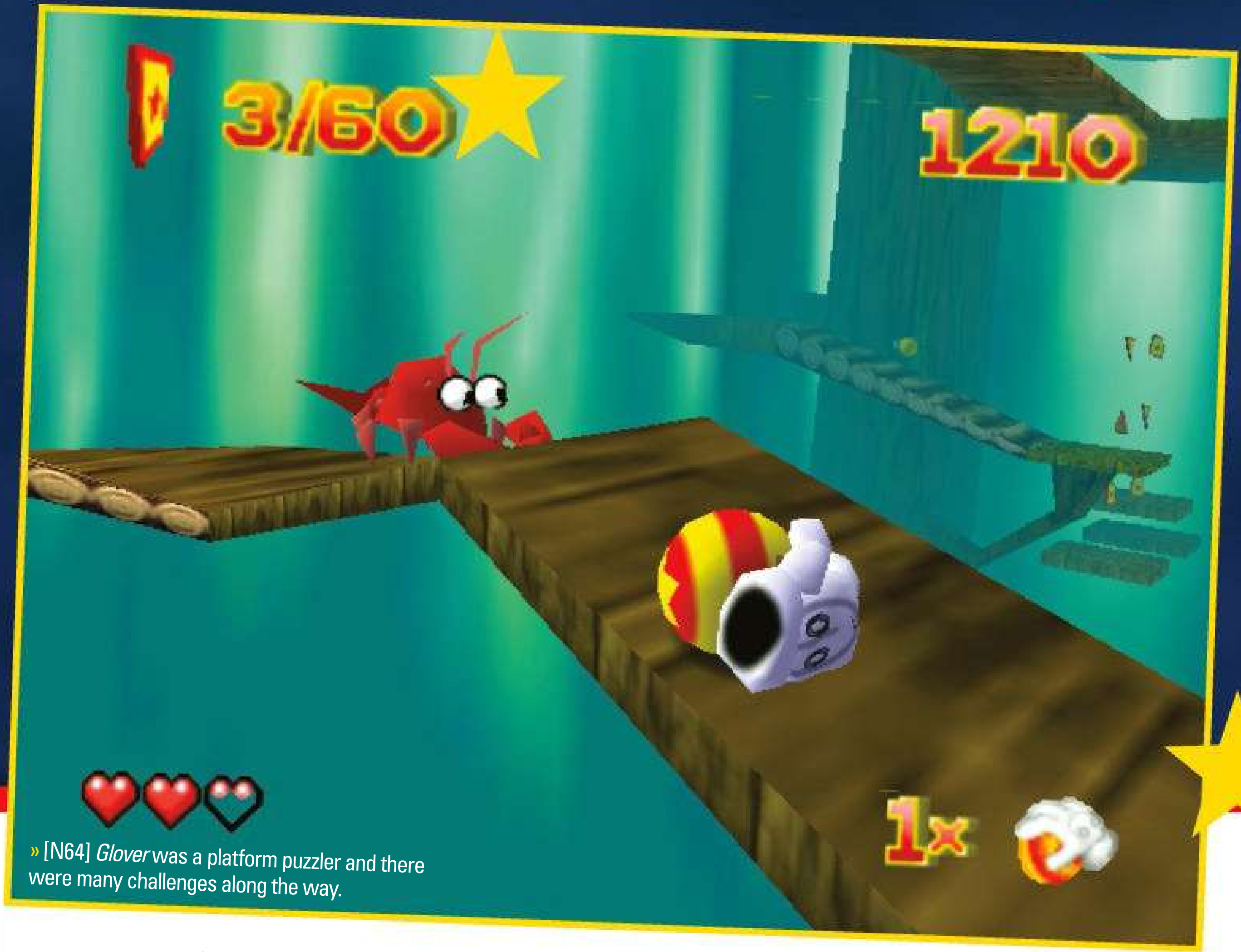
But despite being promoted online and in magazines at the time, it was canned for reasons that, it transpired, had little to do with the new game itself. According to Philip Oliver, the decision was made because publisher Hasbro Interactive had ordered far too many carts of the original *Glover* and that meant it ended up with too much excess stock.

"N64 cartridges were an expensive inventory," Philip explains. "We heard Hasbro ordered 600,000 and, after a year, they'd sold 400,000. But because margins were so tight the unsold 200,000 were causing issues and that was the main reason for cancelling *Glover 2*. The inventory risks were just too great."

Despite that, the game's 40-plus developed areas did see the light of day (although a planned Dreamcast version didn't get off the ground). In 2010, the website NESWorld.com got hold of an N64 prototype which started with the Wizard fishing in a fountain and was largely playable as many since will attest. Estimates have suggested that the game was between 60 and 85% complete.

HASBRO Interactive
NINTENDO64
Only For
GLOVER

» 200,000 excess copies of *Glover* meant the planned sequel was cancelled.



» [N64] *Glover* was a platform puzzler and there were many challenges along the way.

and this led to Glover's ability to cast a spell to change its size and weight. It led to all sorts of interesting puzzles for the players to solve."

But rather than nail everything down at the start, the development process remained fluid throughout. "We kept asking ourselves, what else can Glover do?" Darren says. "We were building the game from the ground up so it was very quick to prototype new moves and quickly play around with them to see what worked. Then we built puzzles around these new moves and mechanics."

Darren is proud of *Glover*'s many puzzles. "It was a highly creative time with a small, dedicated team where everything seemed possible," he continues. "Lots of the puzzles are a result of someone having an idea, spending an afternoon playing around with it and then someone going off and building it into the level. Things began moving very fast!"

Perfecting Glover's animation was a great challenge, though. The basic rigs had to accommodate the grip of the glove and ensure the character could walk, as Rich explains. "It had to look good in both character and hand form and Dave had plenty of frustrating days wrestling with the character," he adds. Bouncing the ball was also tricky but Darren says Steve did an amazing job of writing a physics simulation that allowed the ball to be thrown around the environment so that it behaved realistically.

"Moves like throw and whack were fairly straightforward," Darren says. "But bouncing the ball had to feel good and this came with a lot of challenges especially when bouncing up stairs or uneven surfaces. It was made even harder by the fact that you had to keep tapping the button to bounce the ball – it seemed like a great idea at the time but, in hindsight, added unnecessary complexity to an already challenging move."

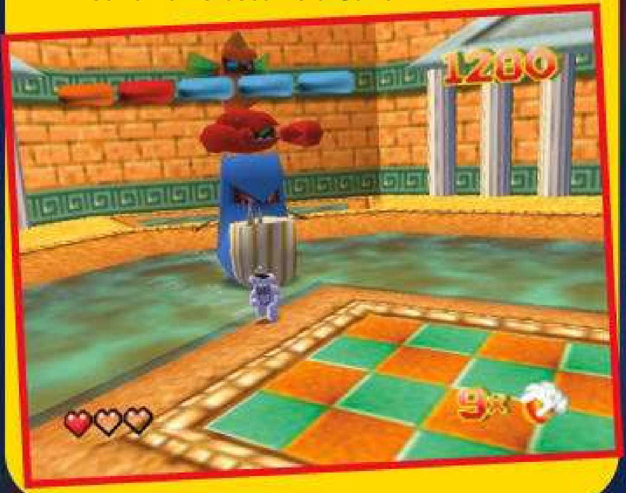
Whether or not the overall controls succeeded is debatable. "We had the basic control scheme up and running pretty quickly and added and refined new moves as we went along," says Darren. "But one day, *Super Mario 64* came along and really set a new bar in terms of what was expected for character controls in this genre. ▶

WHAT'S A GARIB?

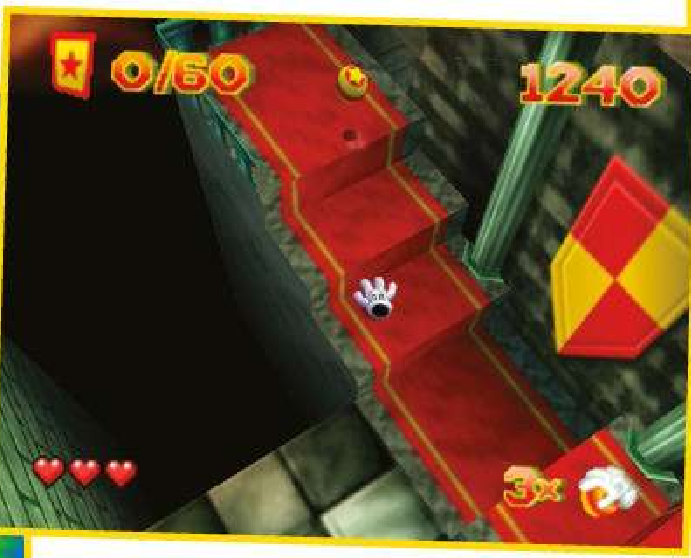
GLOVER FEATURED A NUMBER OF UNUSUAL NAMES

■ The development team had heaps of fun creating *Glover*, especially when coming up with the names of the enemies and the non-player characters. As Rich recalls "the ape boss was Spank The Monkey", with Darren pouring forth with lots of others. "The space hopper was called Dennis, of course, the triceratops was called Tracy Rotops and there was my favourite, the knight Thrice Knightly," he laughs.

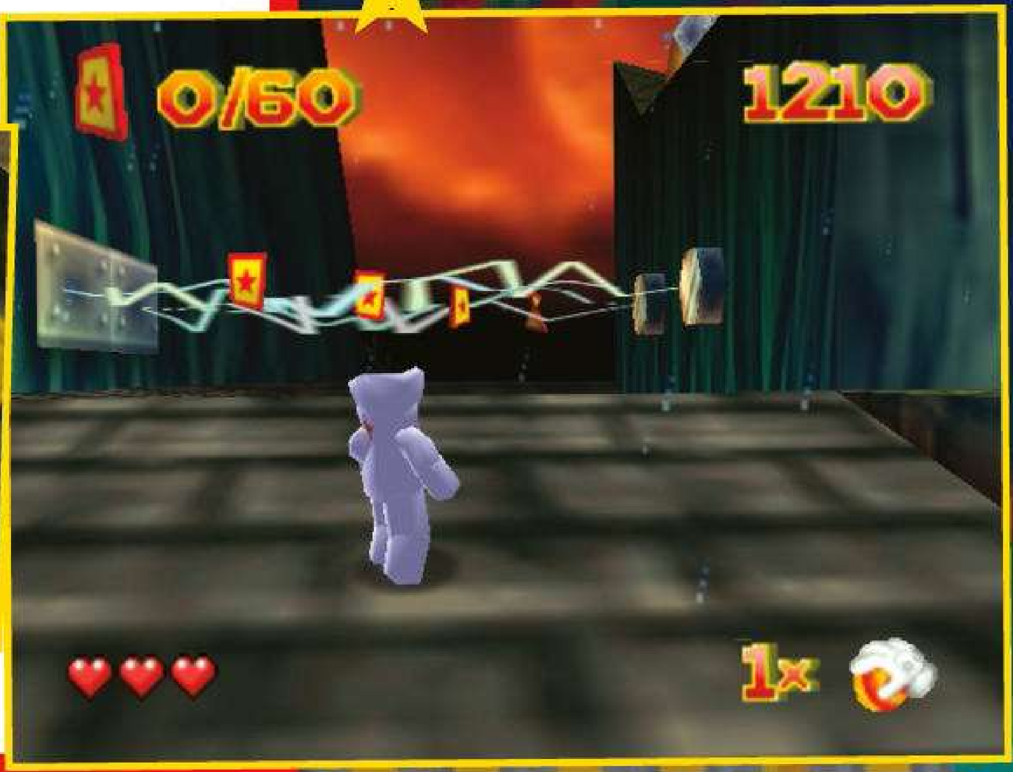
But what of the Garibs – the cards that people had to collect? Were they laden with 'hidden' meanings too? "The studio was doing a port for a Japanese company at around the time of *Glover* and they got a faxed bug report (yes, a faxed bug report!) which had one item that read, 'There is a problem with the Garib.' No one knew what a Garib was – there was no reference to it in the in game or in the code. So it kind of became an office meme: anything without a name became a Garib."



» [N64] There were six weird and wonderful levels in total, each one themed for variety.

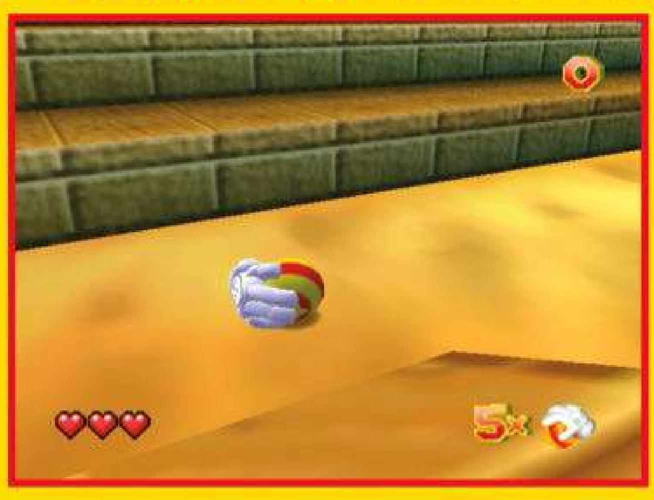
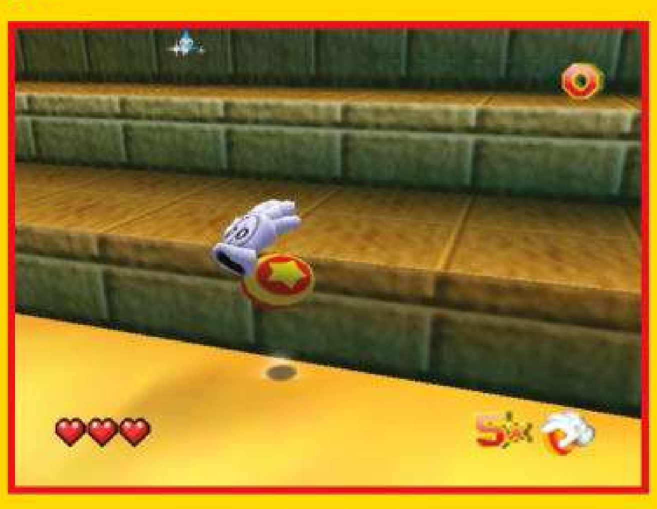
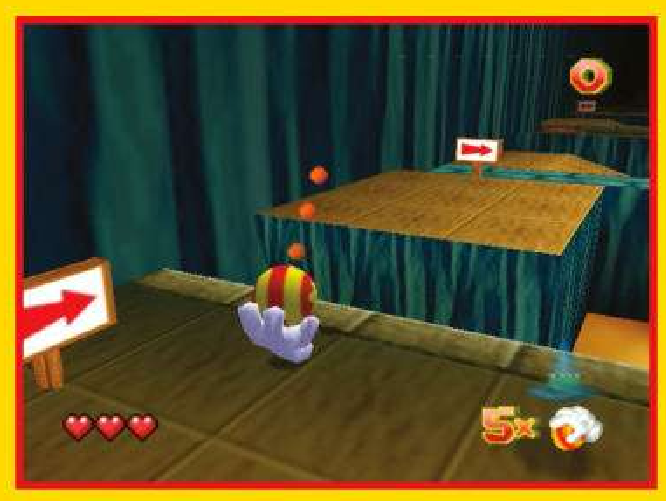


» [N64] As well as ensuring Glover could get around each level, players needed to grab the ball too!



HAVING A BALL

A LOOK AT GLOVER'S DIFFERENT BALL SKILLS

ROLLING THE BALL

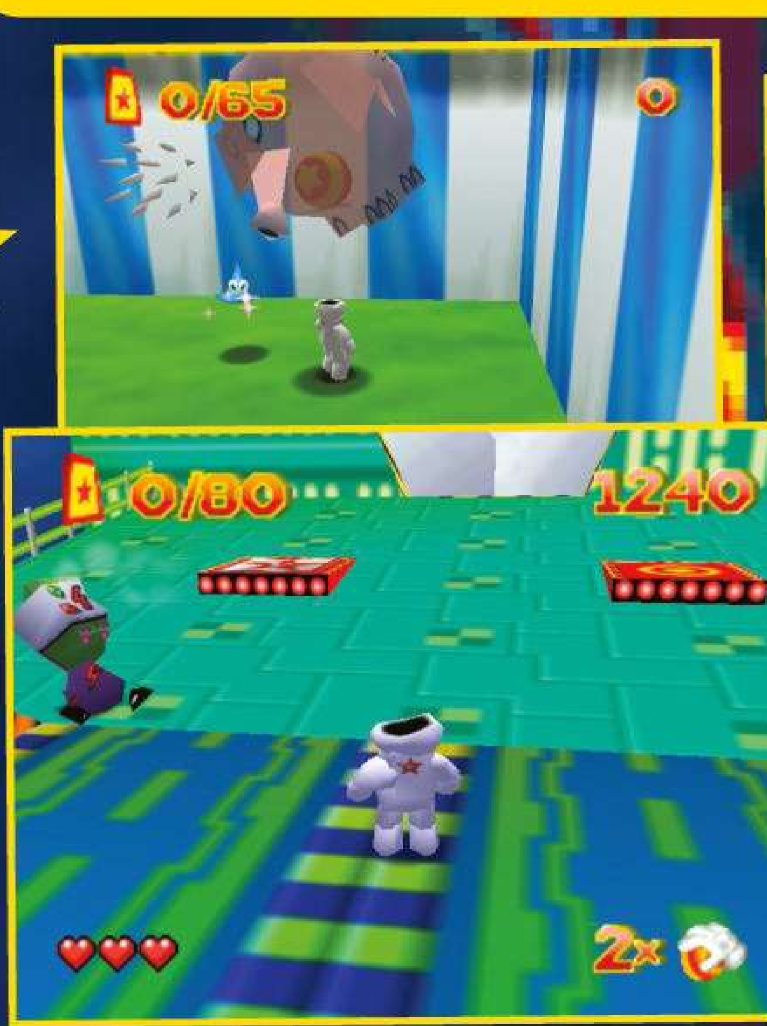
■ All players should start with the practice level to get a good idea of how the ball can be controlled. The most basic method involves simply walking towards the ball and getting Glover to move it along the ground. Tapping B allows Glover to grab it.

BOUNCING THE BALL

■ The ball can be bounced by repeatedly tapping the B button. While it's in this state, you're able to move around and this is a great way of being able to get up stairs or raised platforms. By holding B, the ball will be thrown, again great for those hard-to-reach places.

THROWING THE BALL

■ To get the ball across gaps, you only need to hold B, point the control stick in the required direction and let go. You get to see a series of dots before you make the final move so you'll have a good idea of where it's going to land.



» [N64] There were a fair few characters wandering around *Glover*'s levels.

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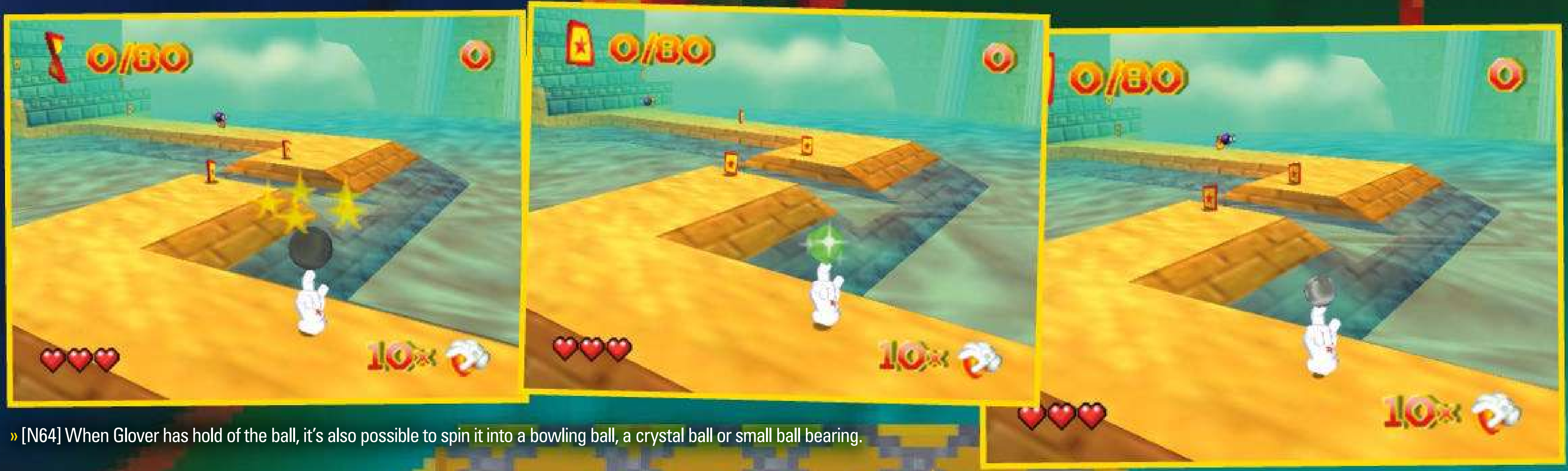
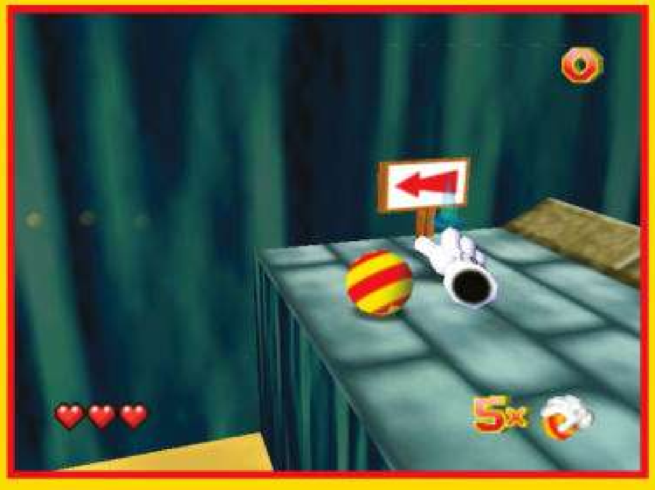
» [N64] That's not going to squeeze through the gap but Glover may be doing cartwheels when he figures the solution!

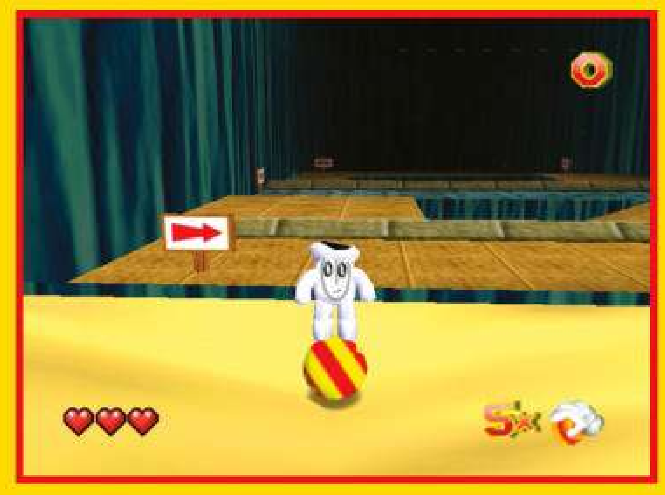


» [N64] When Glover has hold of the ball, it's also possible to spin it into a bowling ball, a crystal ball or small ball bearing.



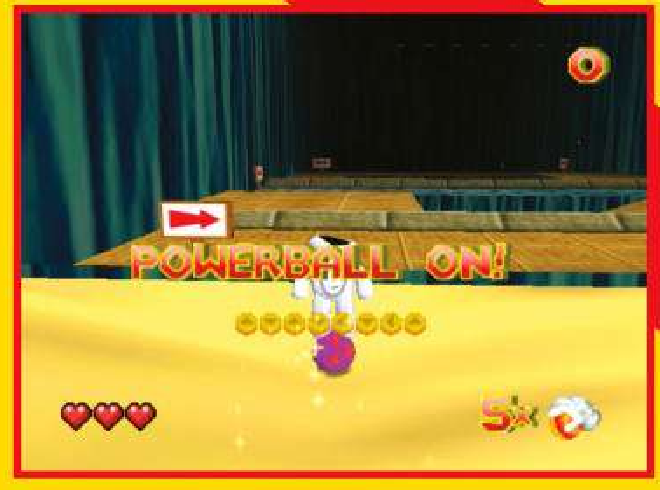
SLAPPING THE BALL

One of the most used moves is the slap, performed using the A button and using the control stick to point in the required direction. This will ensure the ball travels further than a throw and it's great at combating enemies and breaking things.



JUMPING ON THE BALL

You can also get Glover to leap onto the ball and walk with it under his feet. This is great for getting across water for instance, but it's also possible to begin bouncing on the ball by holding down A and this effectively turns it into a trampoline.



WHY NOT CHEAT?

There are loads of cheats which can affect the ball and you can either look them up or wait until the end credits to view them! Balls can be instantly called, made large, turned into a boomerang or converted into something super bouncy for instance.

We spent a lot of time deconstructing the controls and player movement as well as the many different gameplay cameras."

> "I STILL REMEMBER THE DAY I MANAGED TO RENDER A SINGLE TRIANGLE ON THE SCREEN – IT WAS A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT"
> DARREN WOOD

Despite the tweaks, *Glover*'s controls still received criticism from some reviewers and gamers who found getting to grips with the glove and the ball would often feel frustrating. The controls required patience to master and, combined with a camera that didn't always show the best view of the action, it could be tricky to play. But that wasn't the only bugbear. There was also fogging and framerate drops but Darren says the team was still finding their feet with the new console.

"I still remember the day I managed to render a single triangle on the screen – it was a major achievement," he says. "We built the whole game: rendering engine, physics system, animation system, graphic pipelines and so on in something like 18 months with a handful of programmers. Usually, with each game you optimise and evolve your code as you learn more about the hardware. But as this was our first N64 game, we were very much learning as we went along."

Fogging and reduced draw distance was a way of tackling performance challenges so that fewer polygons and enemies were rendered at any time. "In hindsight, we should have created stricter guidelines for how we built levels to ensure we were better able to manage performance," Darren says. Even so, *Glover* was still appealing. "The look of the game came primarily from Richard's mind," Darren adds. " And he did amazing concept sketches and character designs which really informed and inspired the look and creation of the levels." Indeed he did. Rich put loads of effort into the designs, creating overviews of the key levels which covered how they would feel while detailing some of the main puzzles they would contain. He split them across six themes – Atlantis, Carnival, Pirates, Prehistoric, Fortress Of Fear and Out Of This World – each one intended to add variety and widen *Glover*'s scope.

"We wanted every world to have a strong unique theme, from a graphical, audio and puzzle perspective so we picked themes that would be visually distinct, have lots of puzzle opportunities and be fun to play around in," Darren says. Rich says that the 3D artists used the blueprints as a starter before adding to them with their own creativity. "Like most of the development, it was a team effort to get the final levels in place," Rich says. "As a concept designer, I wanted more details and content but we were ultimately limited to what the N64 could load up and shift around on its architecture. My biggest frustration was that the console didn't have a lot of texture space and we were limited to a few 64x64 pixel textures, a handful of 32x32s and a scattering of 16x16 and 8x8. That's not a lot to detail an entire level."

To give players a sense of progression, each of the six levels were split into three sections, a decision that was also partly made because of system restrictions ("It helped with memory and performance," Darren says). Boss battles were also added. "The bosses gave an opportunity for players to finish the world with a new and different gameplay experience and we also included bonus levels to reward players who took the time to find every single Garib in the main levels," Darren explains.

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For those who have never played the game, the Garibs were 'magic' cards scattered throughout the game and players had to collect a certain number, many of which were hidden. As development reached its final stage, these cards were incorporated into a story which suggested Glover's master, the Good Wizard, had accidentally mixed potions, caused an explosion and created a bad guy called Cross-Stitch. "With a lot of magic in the game, it made sense that the gloves would belong to a wizard and the rest dropped into place." Darren says.

Indeed, *Glover*'s story is the icing on the cake for a game which Rich describes as being "colourful, a little weird and atypical". And the whole off-beat concept certainly did no harm. *Glover* ended up selling 400,000 units and there were plans for a sequel. That the game has been re-released in 2022 on PC is testament that it deserves a revisit, if only on innovative grounds alone.

"We had lots of good times making this game, and it certainly stands out as one of the most fun and creative projects I've worked on in my 29 years in the business," Darren says. *

Arcade Stick

» **PLATFORM:** Dreamcast » **YEAR:** 1998
» **COST:** £34.99 (launch), £55+ (today, boxed), £40+ (today, unboxed)

Sega had always been keen to use its arcade success to bolster its home-console business, and with the NAOMI arcade board sporting almost identical specs to the Dreamcast, home conversions were easier to produce than ever before. As a result, Sega manufactured an official arcade stick just as it had for its previous consoles, and had it ready for the fanatical *Virtua Fighter 3tb* fans at the system's Japanese launch. The controller uses parts with a green colour scheme which mimic those found on real arcade machines, and a body that incorporates some of the Dreamcast styling.

The controller has one expansion slot for memory cards and other peripherals, and on a technical level it functions much like a regular Dreamcast controller. The digital joystick replaces the digital d-pad and digital C and Z buttons replace the analogue L and R triggers. As such, although the arcade stick is most coveted by fans of the console's plentiful conversions of fighting games and shoot-'em-ups, it will work perfectly well with any game which doesn't require the analogue stick or triggers. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME

MARVEL VS CAPCOM 2

Like the Saturn before it, the Dreamcast received a number of excellent ports of Capcom fighting games. But where the Saturn's control pad had been an ideal fit for these games, the Dreamcast's slightly awkward d-pad and four face buttons didn't do them justice. The arcade stick is an ideal remedy to this problem, with a proper six-button layout that fits those games perfectly. Forced to pick just one, we'd plump for *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* – the comic-book crossover is the biggest, silliest and most chaotic of the lot.

1069300
69
PRESS START BUTTON
RYU
GUILE
8HIT

X
Y
Z
A
B
C
mcast

Arcade Stick fact

■ Although it was distributed by Sega in Japan and Europe, Sega Of America declined to distribute the arcade stick itself and left the job to Agetec.

SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

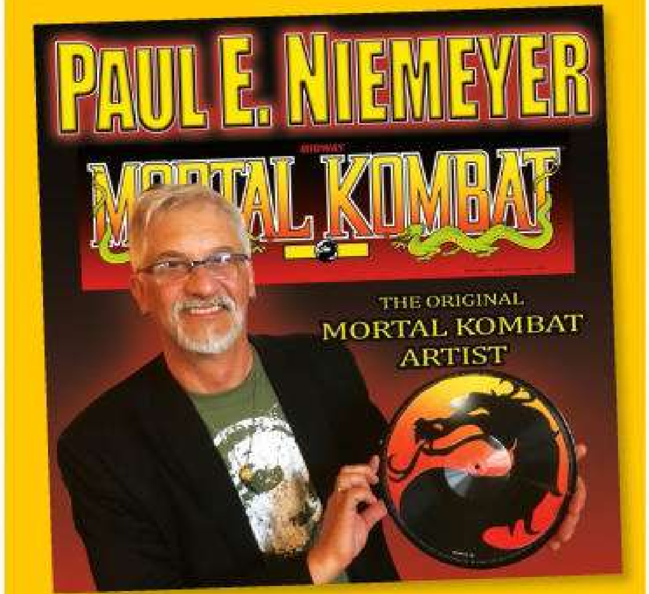
In the chair with...

PAUL NIEMEYER

He has had a hand in some of the most iconic arcade art of the Eighties and Nineties. Meet Paul E Niemeyer, whose wit is as sharp as his blade

Words by Paul Drury

Back in the Golden Age, a big part of the arcade experience were the cabinets themselves. Standing before these imposing beasts of wood and metal, preparing to do battle, left a lasting impression. Artist Paul Niemeyer worked at Bally Midway in the early part of the Eighties and helped create the marquee and side-art for such titles as *Satan's Hollow*, *Super Pac-Man* and the beautiful *Discs Of Tron* environmental cabinet. He continued in the business as a freelancer and is best known for his work on the original *Mortal Kombat* machine.



» Paul often attends gaming shows to talk about his arcade work. Make sure you say hello from us.

Photos Credit John Depasquale photography

Your email address is 'whatisart4' so let's start there. What do you think art is for?
[Laughs] That's a good question and I'm usually the one asking it! [Puts on hippie voice] "Yeah, baby, I want you to think about that, maaaan." I think it's to enhance, to entertain… and you cannot touch anything in your everyday life that didn't have an artist involved somewhere. Somebody had to design everything. We are immersed in art.

You have worked on many arcade titles but also everything from board games to advertising campaigns for Budweiser and Jack Daniel's. Does each project require a different mindset?
I approach every project the same way: gather up all the information I need, lay it out, look at it like a puzzle and let it come together, like in the [Netflix series] *The Queen's Gambit* when she sees the pieces moving on the ceiling…

We hope you've not been taking as many drugs as her.
We're not being recorded, right? We are? Then no comment.

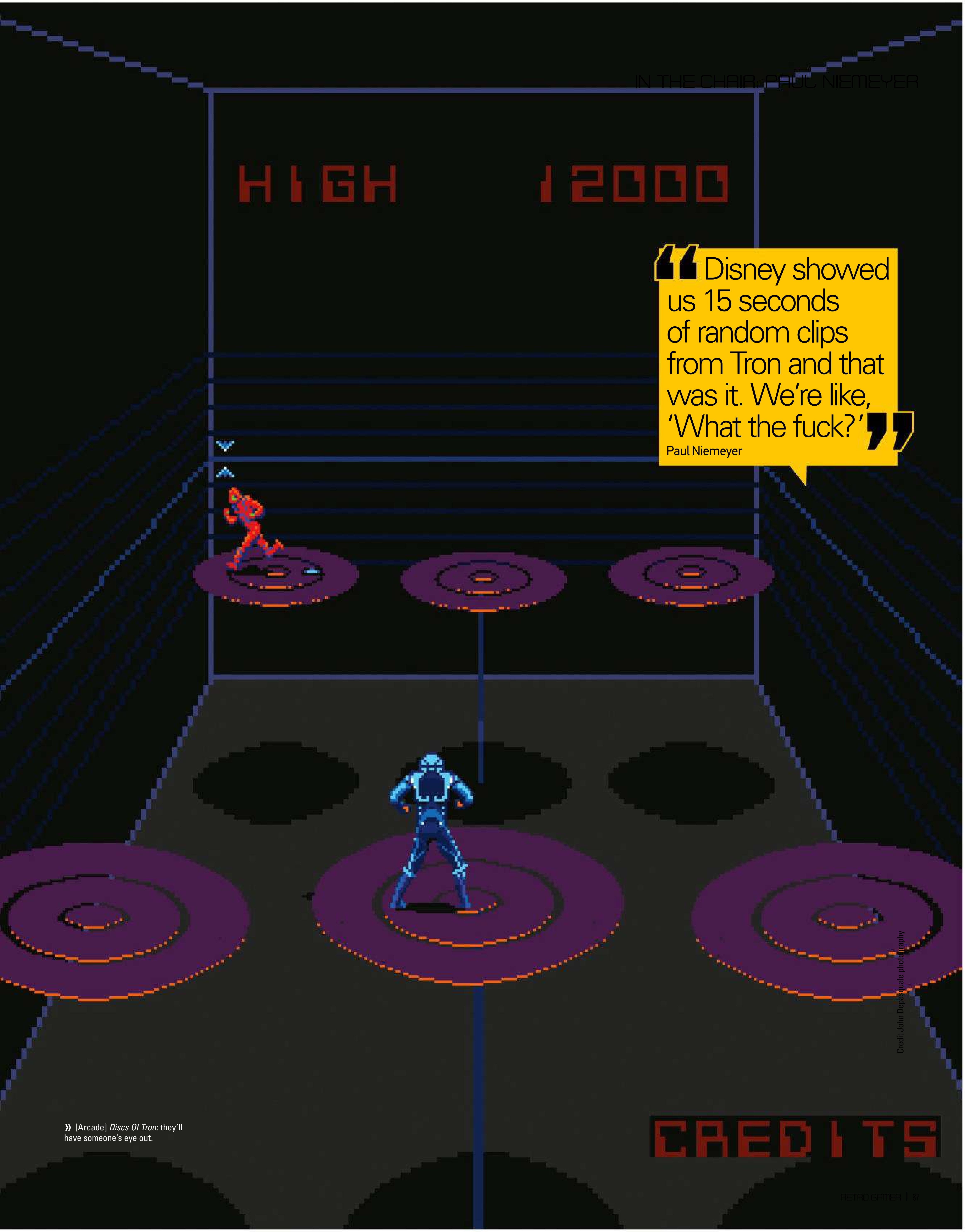
Did you study art?
I have a double major in illustration and ceramic design from Eastern Illinois University but in college, I was addicted to pinball, to the point I'd show up at the start of class, sign the register and then slip off to play pinball in the student centre all afternoon. Even back then, in the back of my head I was thinking, "Someday I'll be a pinball artist and all shall worship me."

It must have felt like that was coming true when you joined Bally Midway in 1982.
I was actually hired by Midway. They were building this huge white brick, black glass building, and it was pretty effin' cool. We nicknamed it 'the house that Pac built' because of all the money they'd made on licensing *Pac-Man*. That became kind of poignant years later when things didn't work out quite as well as they'd planned.

You ended up working on quite a few *Pac-Man* games.
Oh yeah. My very first job at Midway was to cut some colour screens for the cocktail version of *Ms Pac-Man*. They asked, "Does anyone know how to do production art?" and I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" I'd been working for a little sign-writing company in Chicago. I could see there were two ways I could carve a niche out for myself [at Midway]: being the fastest knife in town for cutting screens and being the fastest wrist in the business when it came to marker renderings. Those were desirable skills in the coin-op business!

Did things change when Bally, who had owned Midway since 1969, brought the two companies together as Bally Midway in 1982?
Oh yeah. There were just three of us in the Midway art department and we were a happy little group. After a few months, they moved us all into the brand-new building and combined us with the Bally art gods.

Erm, 'art gods'?
I was a fanboy! It was like these guys had descended from Valhalla and occupied the cubicles next to mine. I'm going, "What the fuck! I played this guy's games in college and now I'm working with him. Wow!" That lasted for about a nanosecond until I realised, "Oh fuck. I've got to compete with these guys, the sons of bitches… I'm never gonna get a game to do, I'm never gonna get noticed. I'll be taking out the trash, day and night." I was elated and then depressed in the space of less than a second.



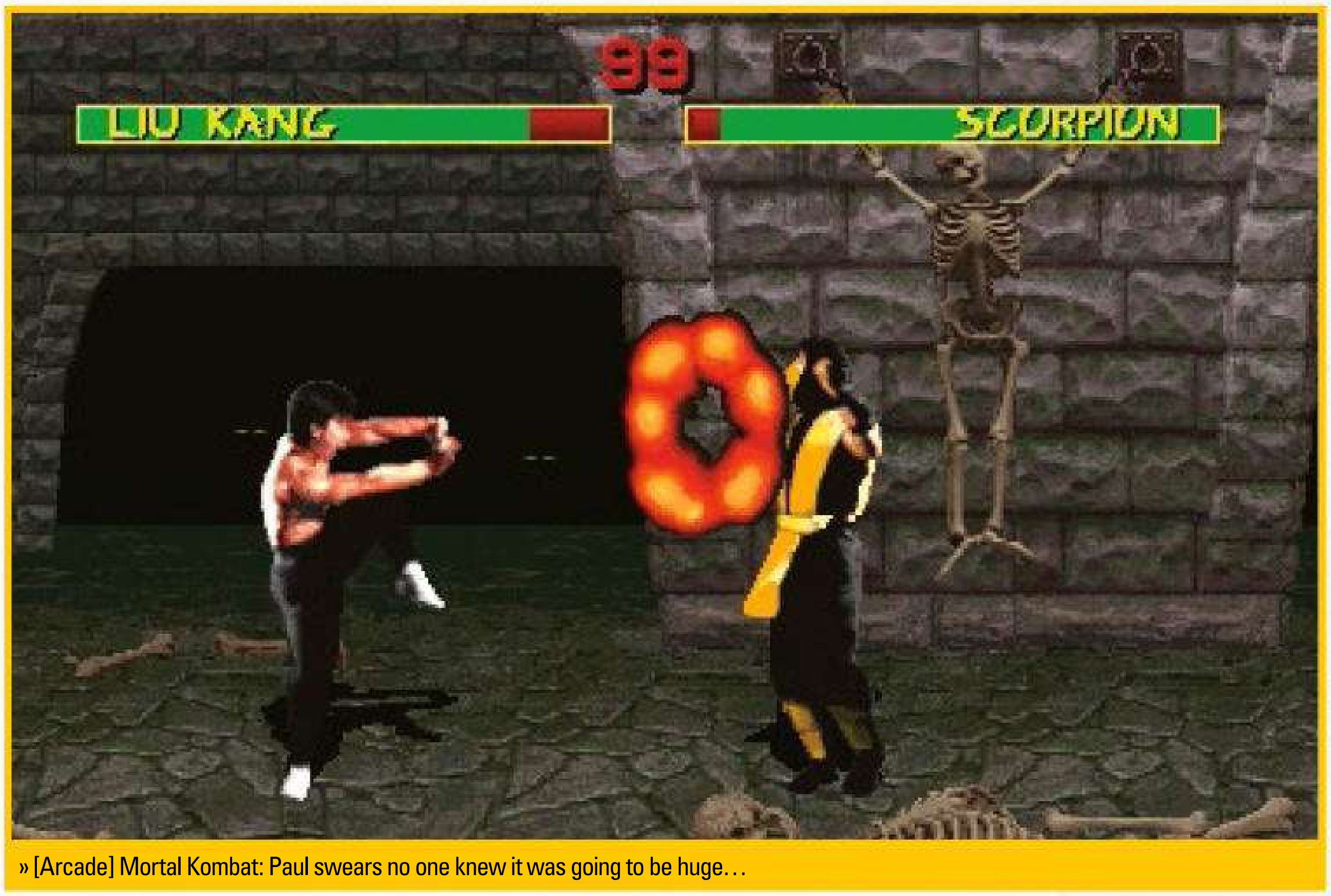
» [Arcade] *Discs Of Tron*: they'll have someone's eye out.

> "Disney showed us 15 seconds of random clips from Tron and that was it. We're like, 'What the fuck?'"
>
> Paul Niemeyer

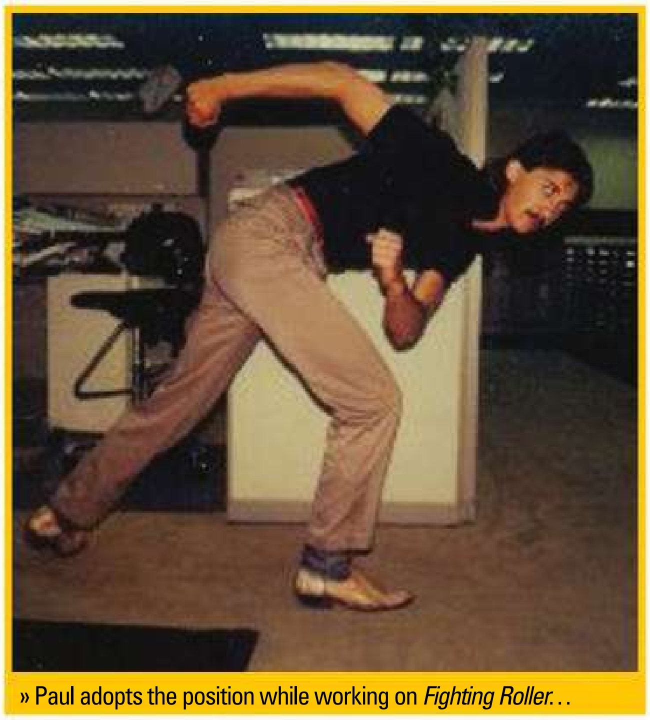
Credit: John Depasquale photography

SELECTED TIMELINE

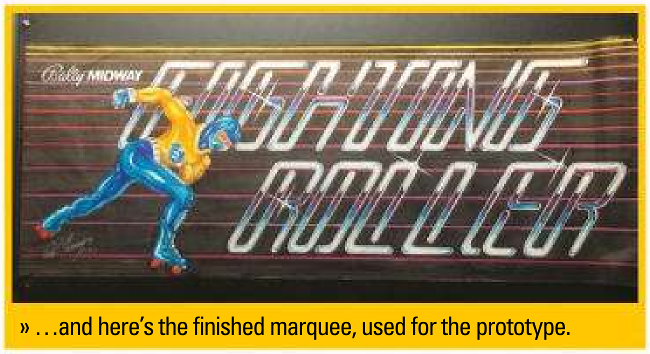
- **MS PAC-MAN** [1981] ARCADE
- **TRON** [1982] ARCADE
- **PAC-MAN PLUS** [1982] ARCADE
- **SUPER PAC-MAN** [1982] ARCADE
- **SATAN'S HOLLOW** [1982] ARCADE
- **TAPPER** [1983] ARCADE
- **SPY HUNTER** [1983] ARCADE
- **WACKO** [1983] ARCADE
- **MIDNIGHT MARAUDERS** [1984] ARCADE
- **AEROBOTO/FORMATION Z** [1984] ARCADE
- **STAR GUARDS** [1987] ARCADE
- **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION** [1991] MULTI
- **MORTAL KOMBAT** [1992] ARCADE
- **TIME KILLERS** [WHILE ON MK]
- **DEMOLITION MAN** [1994] PINBALL
- **AGE OF STEAM** [2002] BOARD GAME
- **AGE OF MYTHOLOGY** [2002] BOARD GAME
- **AGE OF EMPIRES III** [2005] BOARD GAME
- **LEGENDS OF VALHALLA** [2021] PINBALL



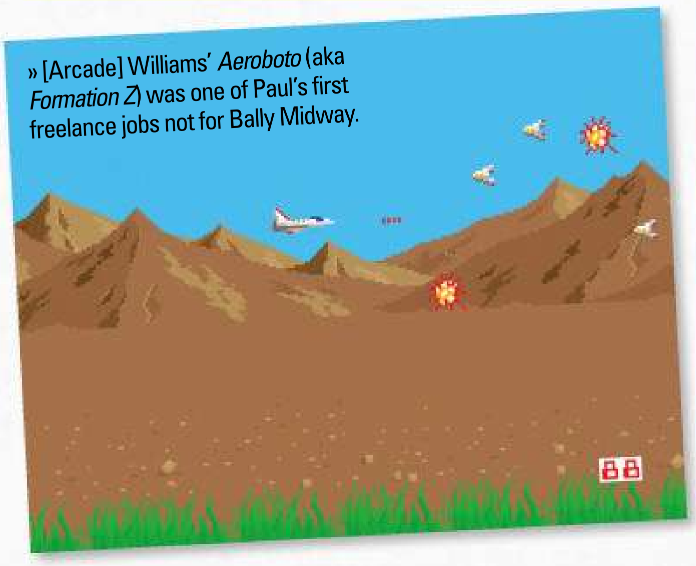
» [Arcade] Mortal Kombat: Paul swears no one knew it was going to be huge…



» Paul adopts the position while working on *Fighting Roller*…



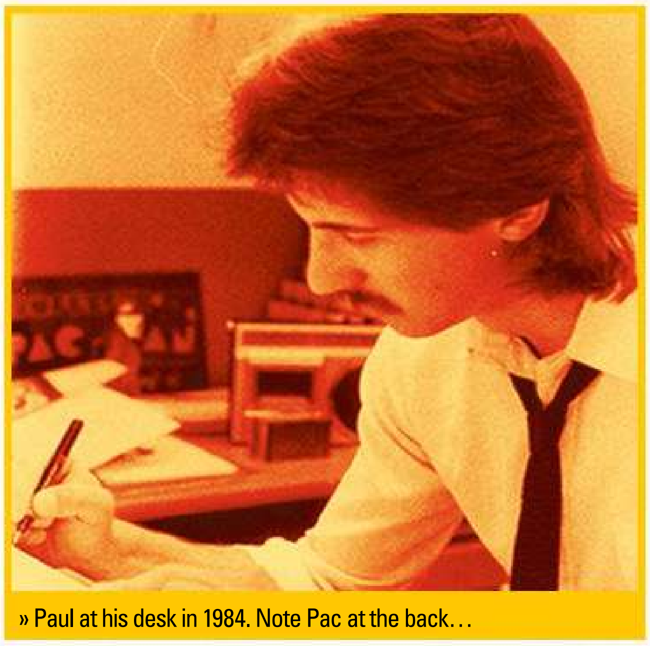
» …and here's the finished marquee, used for the prototype.



» [Arcade] Williams' *Aeroboto* (aka *Formation Z*) was one of Paul's first freelance jobs not for Bally Midway.

What did you do to try to get noticed?
I busted my ass! I was asking for anything I could do and take on anything they asked for. Bally Midway did a lot of prototype games. After the success of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, they were flush with money. They weren't spending it on us, I might add! I was on $19K when I worked there, which was shitty, even in 1982. They had in their heads that only good games came from Japan so they went over there and threw wads of cash at anyone making them. We had an influx of titles they wanted to put out on test and somebody had to produce art for the cabinets. All of these would be one-offs and mainly I did the marquees [the header at the top of an arcade cabinet]. I got them out the door real quick and onto the floor of Aladdin's Castle [arcade] for like a month and they'd see how well they did… and then decide if they wanted to manufacture the game or not.

Can you recall any of the prototypes you worked on?
Oh, I've saved all the art! I'm a goddam packrat.



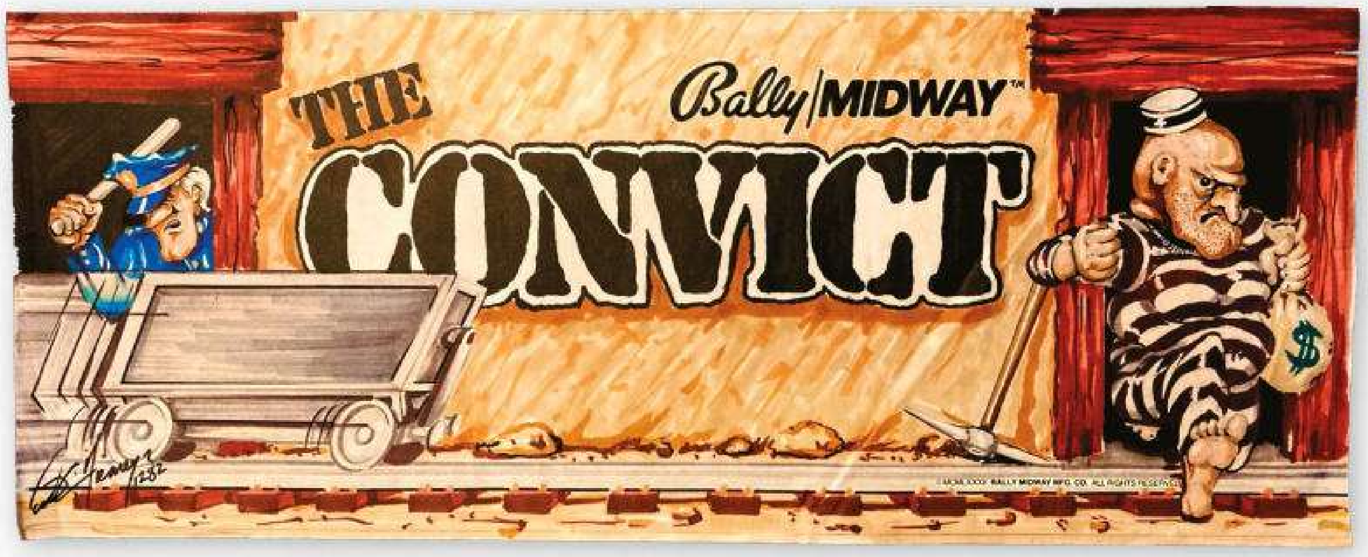
» Paul at his desk in 1984. Note Pac at the back…

[Paul goes off and digs out marquees for *Fighting Rollers*, *The Convict*, *Au* and numerous games we have never heard of]. Man, this stuff is like 40 years old. Sometimes they'd just tell me, "The game is on the loading dock, go and have a look." I'd be thinking, "It'd be nice to play it." They'd tell me the theme and say, "Do something generic. You've got two hours because it's going out today!" Of course, most of these games just died on the vine…

One game you worked on that did go into production was *Discs Of Tron*.
That was the first big game I worked on. I was with Doug Watson and he did the character and I cut all the colour screens for the cabinet art. It was like doing surgery on something that was six feet long! That game was a logistical nightmare to work on and the walk-in cabinet was not built for me. I'm 6-feet 4-inches tall and I still have the dents in my head to prove it.

You made your mark with that game and it made its mark on you…
You can still see the scars [laughs].

Did they provide any movie assets for you to work on?
They brought us into a meeting, just me and Doug, and I was all excited, like, "I'm in! I'm having lunch with the cool kids!" They told us some people from Disney were coming in to tell us about this mysterious project called *Tron*. We were going to get to see the movie so we could get a feel for it. We came out of the meeting all, "Check us out, we're going to see a movie because, we are the shit! Oh yeah!" We were bragging to everyone. A few days later, Disney arrive, they wheel this TV into the meeting room with a huge VHS machine, put the tape in and we're like, "Should we get popcorn?' They press play and show us 15 seconds of random clips from the movie



» Paul's marquee for *The Convict*, released into arcades in 1982 and then absconded…

spliced together. A light cycle, a guy throwing a disc… and that's it. We're like, "What the fuck?" They took out the tape and left.

That's not much to go on.
The worst part was coming out of that meeting because we'd been such assholes, so all our buddies are going, "Ooooh how was the movie? Kind of short, wasn't it? Are Disney cutting back on production times?"

We hope you enjoyed the taste of humble pie, Paul. Can you give us a flavour of the office atmosphere at Bally Midway?
Depends on what floor you were on! Our art department was on the first floor and through some double doors you could get right into the factory. You wanna see what things looked like printed up? Just walk right onto the factory floor. That was awesome. Our cubicles were chest high so I could chat to the Bally art gods, people like Paul Faris, who did *Paragon* and a lot of awesome pinball art, Greg Freres, our boss, Tony Ramoney, who gave me his desk when he went back to Italy and I still use it today. We exchanged ideas and I learned more in the two years I was an employee there than I did in the previous twenty-two… but you know, it was a little clique-ish. Don't get me wrong, I hung out with the Bally guys and partied with them but I always felt like I was the Midway guy.

Can we ask about the partying?
The art department was the stoner's Mecca. We'd go into the spray booth to smoke a doobie. It had a jet engine for an exhaust fan so it could suck out all the smoke like, Boom! Gone! Not a molecule left of evidence.

And you got away with it?
Yeah, there was a lot of looking the other way, a lot of drinking at lunchtime. As long as we met the deadlines, no one cared. We put in a ton of extra hours to make sure things were right, staying late into the night.

> "The art department at Bally Midway was the stoner's Mecca"
> Paul Niemeyer

After collaborating on *Discs Of Tron*, you were given the chance to work on a project on your own.
Paul Faris threw a bunch of blueprints on my table and I asked who I was working with. He said, "You!" This was him showing he had faith in me and my heart was leaping out of my chest. This was my moment to shine! And then he told me the game was called *Satan's Hollow*…

Did you worry about the satanic theme?
Listen, I was raised on a dairy farm in a tiny village, all German, all hardcore Lutherans. Very religious, very conservative and all the crap that goes with that. The irony of my first big break being a game called *Satan's Hollow* was not lost on me. I wasn't going to tell anyone at home about it.

So your family never knew?
I did tell my mom years later and she screwed her face up. I said, "But mom, you're defeating Satan!" Yes, I put demons all over the cabinet but that's because you want kids to put coins in it.

Nowadays, when people play old arcade games via emulation, they don't see the machine itself. How much do you think the cabinet contributed to the whole experience?
Wow, that's a great question and I think ▶

FIVE TO PLAY

Paul's artwork adorned the cabinets of these fine coin-ops

DISCS OF TRON

■ Playing with the killer Frisbee is fun but the main draw here is the wonderfully immersive experience of stepping into the environmental cabinet. We all wanted to be Tron in 1982 and this was as close as you could get to stepping into that neon computer graphics world.

SATAN'S HOLLOW

■ A decent fixed-screen shooter, with flotillas of gargoyles, disembodied demon heads and deadly pterodactyls to dispatch, as you attempt to build a bridge to take on Satan himself. Paul did a hell of a good job with the cabinet art. Sorry…

SUPER PAC-MAN

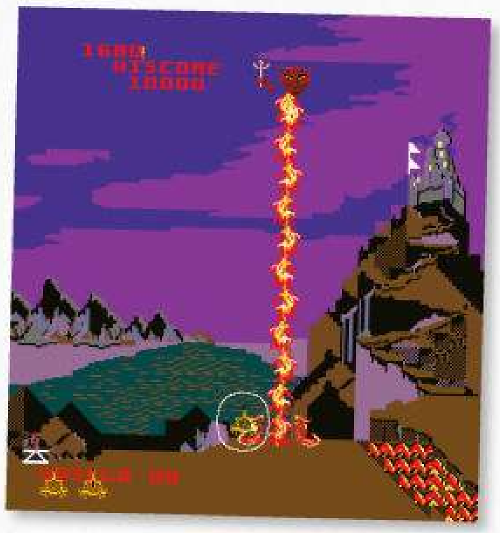
■ Paul worked on several *Pac-Man* games during his time at Midway, including *Pac-Man Plus* and *Professor Pac-Man*. We like this take on dot munching which allows the yellow glutton to be super-sized. You can also find Paul's initials on the cabinet side-art.

WACKO

■ Do not adjust your set. One of the strangest arcade cabinets ever made, the marquee and control panel are set on an angle. The gameplay is pretty odd, too, tasking you with shooting aliens in matching pairs. Nice cartoon-style visuals for the time, as well.

MORTAL KOMBAT

■ The sequel may have improved the formula but the impression the original release had, on both players and politicians, cannot be underestimated. The iconic dragon logo remains one of the most recognised in videogaming and a great source of pride for Paul.

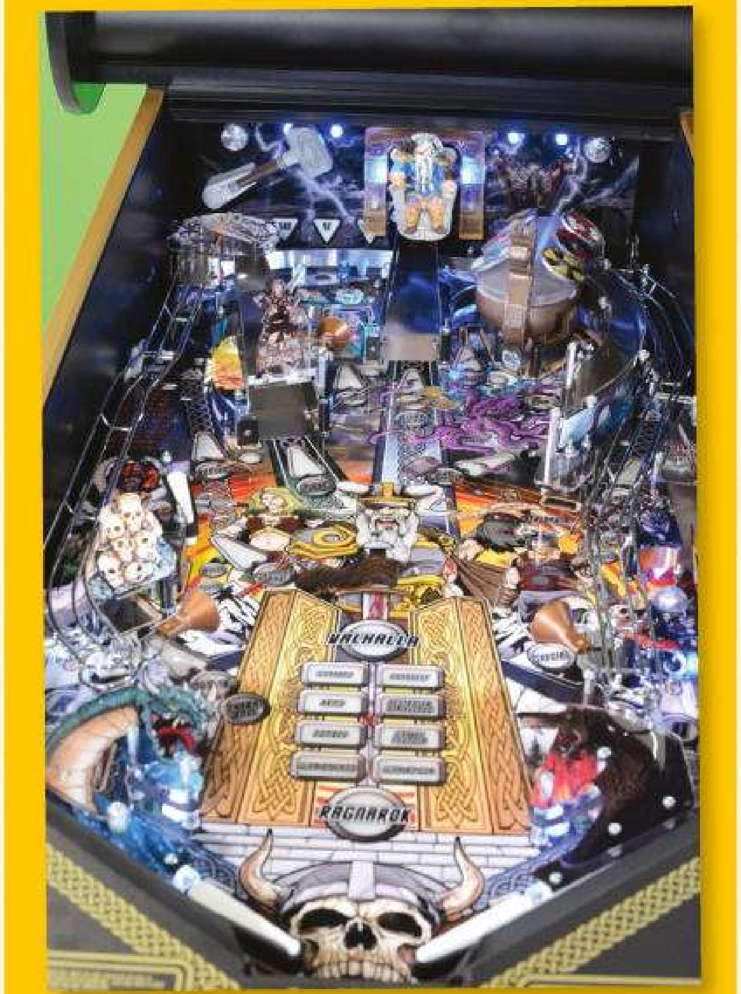


» [Arcade] *Satan's Hollow* was released in 1982, in the midst of the 'satanic panic' gripping the country. All publicity is good publicity, right?

OLD BIG HEAD

Paul also worked on pinball machines

■ Though most of Paul's work in the coin-op business has been for videogames, as a long-time pinball fan, he was delighted to work on the *Demolition Man* table in 1994. "I put together a colour comp of the backglass that was almost final illustration quality," he enthuses. "Everyone loved it, except Wesley Snipes and his gargantuan ego! His head was smaller than Stallone's, and he lost it over that and said I'd portrayed his character as "crazy". Uh, have you seen the movie? Long story short, in the time he screwed around with the concept, Linda Deal, who I was filling in for, became available to finish it and she did the final art, doing an unbelievable job with the worst art direction from Snipes, ever!" Paul finally got his work on a pinball table in 2021, sculpting Odin on his throne, the gates of Valhalla and a pile of skulls for the playfield of American Pinball's *Legends Of Valhalla*, which won Best In Show at the recent Midway Gaming Classic.



» The playfield of *Legends Of Valhalla* features Paul's 3D sculpture work, including the mighty Odin.

the answer is being displayed now more than ever. If you go to somewhere like the Galloping Ghost arcade here in Chicago, the biggest in the world, you see the joy people experience seeing these machines. Kids, too! I've asked them why they like playing these old arcade games and they say it's just so different from playing games on a console at home. It's so tactile, banging the shit out of the buttons and the joystick, and a whole big cabinet dedicated just to one game.

The cabinet was of course the first thing you saw when a new game arrived in an arcade.
When I talk to people at conventions about *Mortal Kombat*, they talk about the marquee being like a beacon for them. A guy once came to my booth and said that he'd come from an abusive family and how the only place he and his brother could escape to was the arcade. They'd go in, look for the *Mortal Kombat* marquee, see that beacon calling to them, and find a little solace from their shitty lives. My heart's already on the floor and then he says, "My brother's gone now, so I play in his memory."

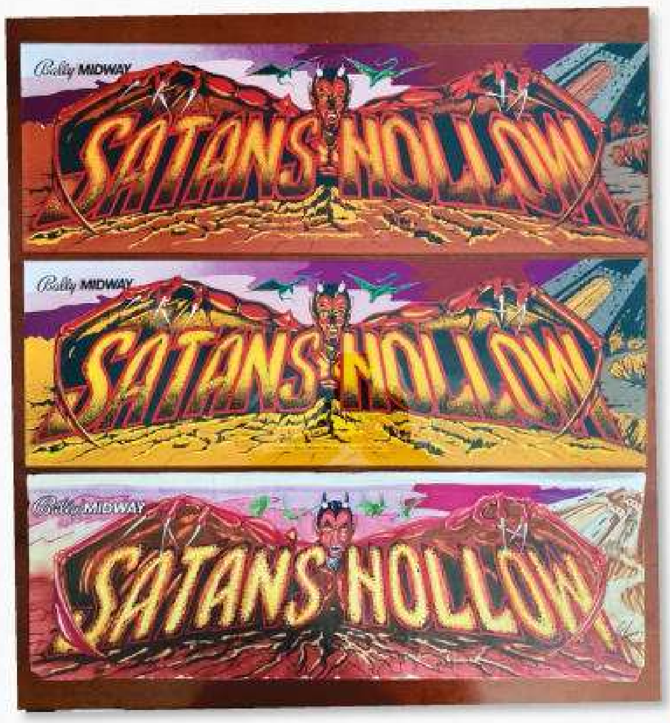
Oh man. It shows what an impact arcade machines had on people all over the world.
Yeah and at the time, I didn't realise how big it all was. Seeing all these people playing our games in the arcade just a couple of blocks down from work was always cool but we didn't realise it was happening everywhere. It only really hit me after I left Bally. I ended up on Michigan Avenue working for ad agencies and they couldn't throw enough money at stuff. I made enough to fund an international ski bum lifestyle for a few years and I remember landing in Brussels, on my way to the alps, and there's a *Satan's Hollow* in the airport. I told the ski group I was with that I did the art on it and they were like, [puts on sarcastic voice] "Yeah right… I hope this guy skis better than he tells stories," so I said, "Hey look, here are my initials."

Did you often sign your game art?
I tried to [laughs]. We weren't allowed to sign anything as artists and Paul Faris hated that. I remember one day he came out of a meeting, cursing under his breath. We all gathered round and he said, "They've been bitching upstairs about us sneaking our initials and signatures into art work and so here's the thing: don't get caught!" You had to be careful so they didn't notice anything until a machine got into production and after that, it was too expensive to change it [laughs]. Look at the art in my games and you'll usually find PEN in there somewhere.

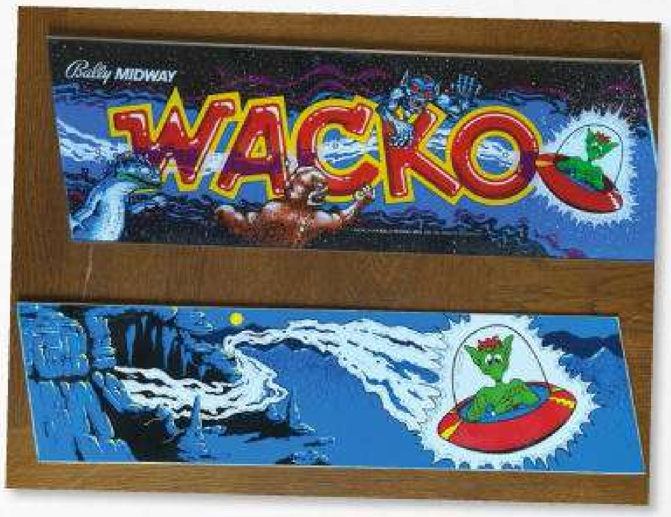
Your initials are rather apt for an artist.
Thanks mom!

Why did you leave Bally Midway to go freelance in 1984?
[Laughs] It was more the case of, "There's the door, buddy. Don't let it hit you in the ass on the way out." It had been the videogame crash of 1983 the year before and I was one of the first to go, which actually did me a gigantic favour. I called my buddies at ad agencies and jobs kept showing up… and still do, to this day. I'm still looking for that perfect job, like I had at Bally, all these years later but I realise it was a one-off, a unicorn. In the meantime, I've built a thriving freelance business.

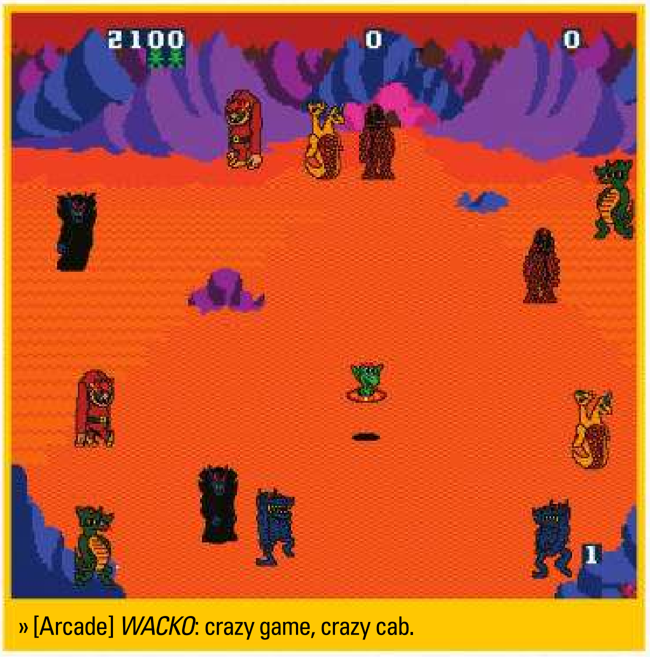
> "John Tobias told me the name of the game so I wrote 'Mortal Combat' and he's like, "With a K!" like that was obvious"
>
> Paul Niemeyer



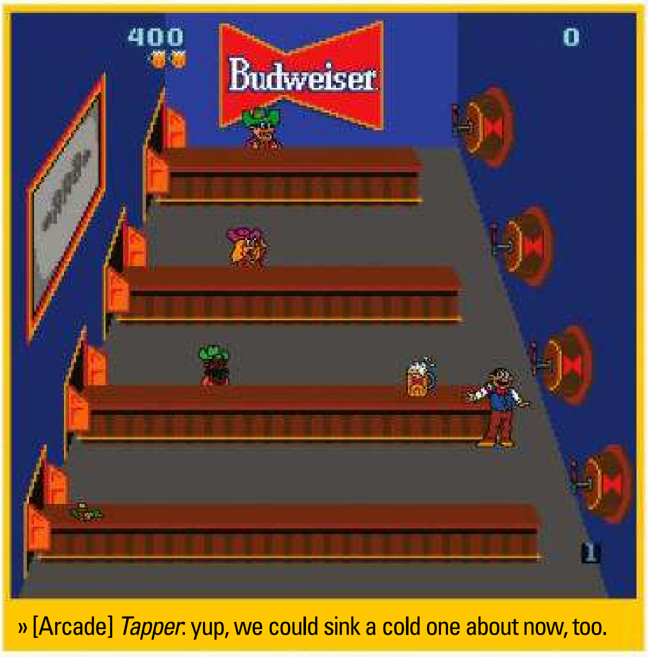
» Paul dances with the devil on these three versions of the *Satan's Hollow* marquee.



» Paul's artwork for the wonderfully wonky *WACKO*.



» [Arcade] *WACKO*: crazy game, crazy cab.



» [Arcade] *Tapper*: yup, we could sink a cold one about now, too.

You continued to work on arcade games as a freelance artist. How did the *Mortal Kombat* gig come about?
It all started with the desk Tony Ramoney gave me! He was shocked I'd not got one already because all the Bally guys had got to keep theirs – but I was the Midway guy. Years later I get a call from Greg Freres, asking me to work on a fighting game they're developing at Williams. I met Jack Hager, Ed Boon and John Tobias, made lots of notes and as I left the room, Greg says, with this big, shit-eating grin on his face, "I hope this makes up for the desk." He got me!

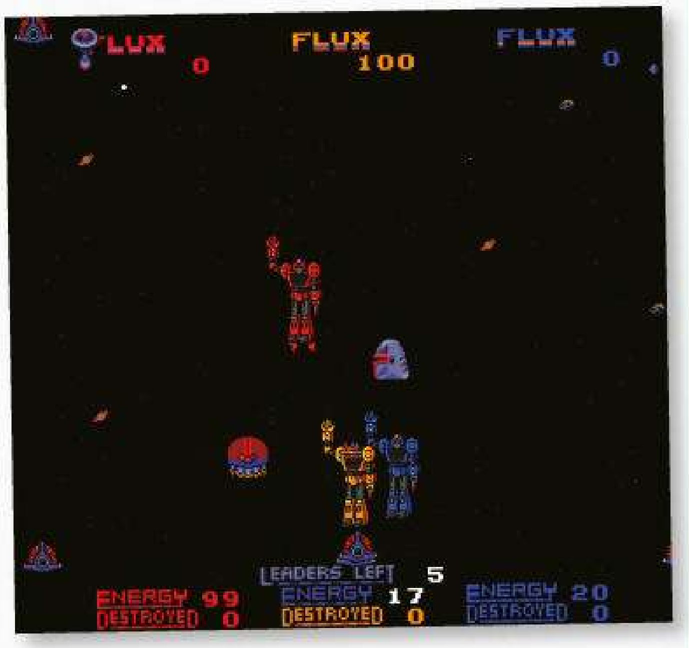
You mention it was initially called *Dragon Attack*. Does that explain the distinctive dragon head logo?
It was actually right at the end of the meeting when John Tobias said, "Oh I almost forgot, we're changing the name." I picked up a marker and wrote 'Mortal Combat' as he told me the new name and he's like, "With a K!" like that was obvious [laughs]. He gave me some sketches, which were comprehensive but rough. I didn't design [the artwork] and I never claimed to have designed it. I illustrated it. People don't understand the difference. They say, "You lying sack of shit, John Tobias did that!" I think it's like if someone wrote a song, then I played the song, but they don't put my name on the record. Shall we say that?

We understand you were simultaneously working on *Time Killers* for Incredible Technologies, right?
I kept that secret for 17 long years because I definitely violated both companies' NDAs. I would've been sued from both sides! Incredible Technologies told me they were doing a game to go up against one they'd heard Williams were working on called *Dragon Attack*. I was like, "Really? Do tell? I'll be right over."

What was their game like?
You know how *Mortal Kombat* has digitised characters but the backgrounds are all electronically created? *Time Killers* was the opposite. All the backgrounds to the game – and I mean in-game, not the cabinet art – were hand drawn and painted by me, kind of like cartoon cells. I was doing work for both games, in my office, next to each other. I was getting calls from both companies… man, I was getting the fear. And to get both done took some serious sleep deprivation.

In the new millennium, you cofounded Eagle Games and created board game versions of popular videogame franchises like *Sid Meier's Civilization* and *Age Of Empires*. Whatever the format, it seems games are in your blood.
I think it goes back to my childhood, those harsh Illinois winters on the farm. You're holed up in the house, so what do you do? You play games. They were wonderful family bonding times. My parents were so supportive. Even though there were chores to do on the farm, they always let me have time to draw. They were just perfect. ✱

Thanks to Paul for sharing his original images and Martyn Carroll for additional help.



» [Arcade] After leaving Bally Midway, Paul continued to work for the company as a freelancer on such titles as *Star Guards*.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Post your questions at retrogamer.net/forum

Rossi46: Did you have any sense at the time of just how big the *Mortal Kombat* brand was going to be?

Less than zero! In fact, Midway – well, really it was Williams, but they kept Midway on the door for reasons unknown – was only going to make 300 machines as an initial run, which was their way of saying, "We have no faith in this game." I'm guessing 300 was the bare minimum for a production run, the break-even point, but don't quote me on that! I was only on board as a freelancer because they didn't want to tie up a staff artist but that allowed us to be as innovative as we wanted to be, because no one was 'watching the kids'.

Northway: What kind of tools have you been using through the years?

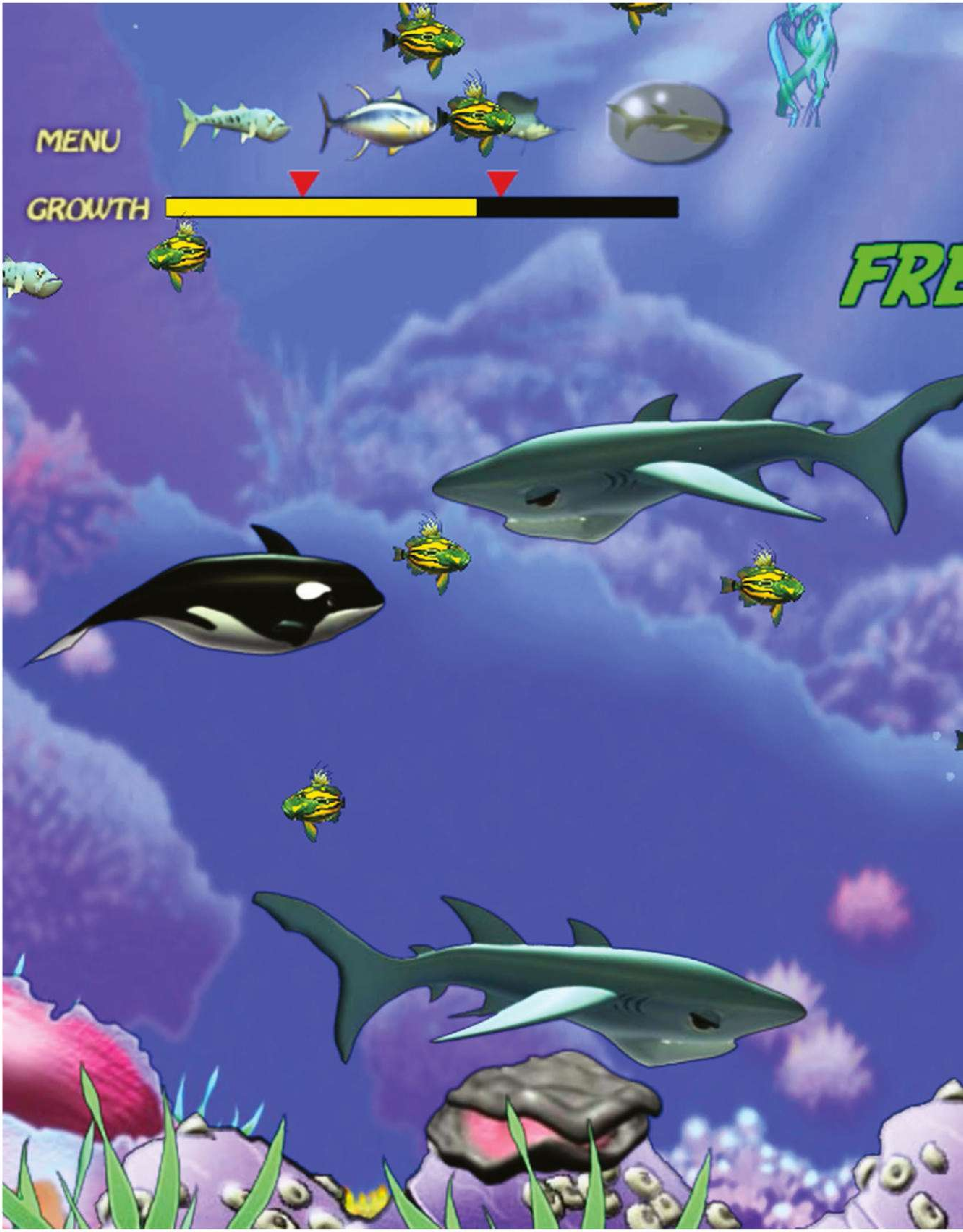
My best tool is that goo keeping my ears from slapping together. It runs on a pretty steady diet of caffeine, and a bunch of other stuff… but, seriously, the business has gone from a world of traditional art tools – pen and ink, paints and airbrushes – to digital and electronically generated imagery. I finally broke down and got on the computer in 2004. Since then, I've found myself melding the old-school skills and my more recent computer skills to create something unique.

The Alex: I loved the realism of *Mortal Kombat*'s graphics at the time but do you think nowadays the art is being lost in the pursuit of realism?

I see how you could make that argument, but I think that the art, and the form it took, was always determined by the technology available, or the lack thereof. I think those restrictions generated something unique and cool that could have only existed at that time.

Merman: Which game's art took the most time to create?

That is difficult to say. The amount of a game's artwork I was responsible for varied. For some games, I was the designer, illustrator and the production artist, while other games, I may have only had one or two of those jobs… plus, the time worked on them is weirdly like a blur, where you remember all the things you did but time stood while you did it.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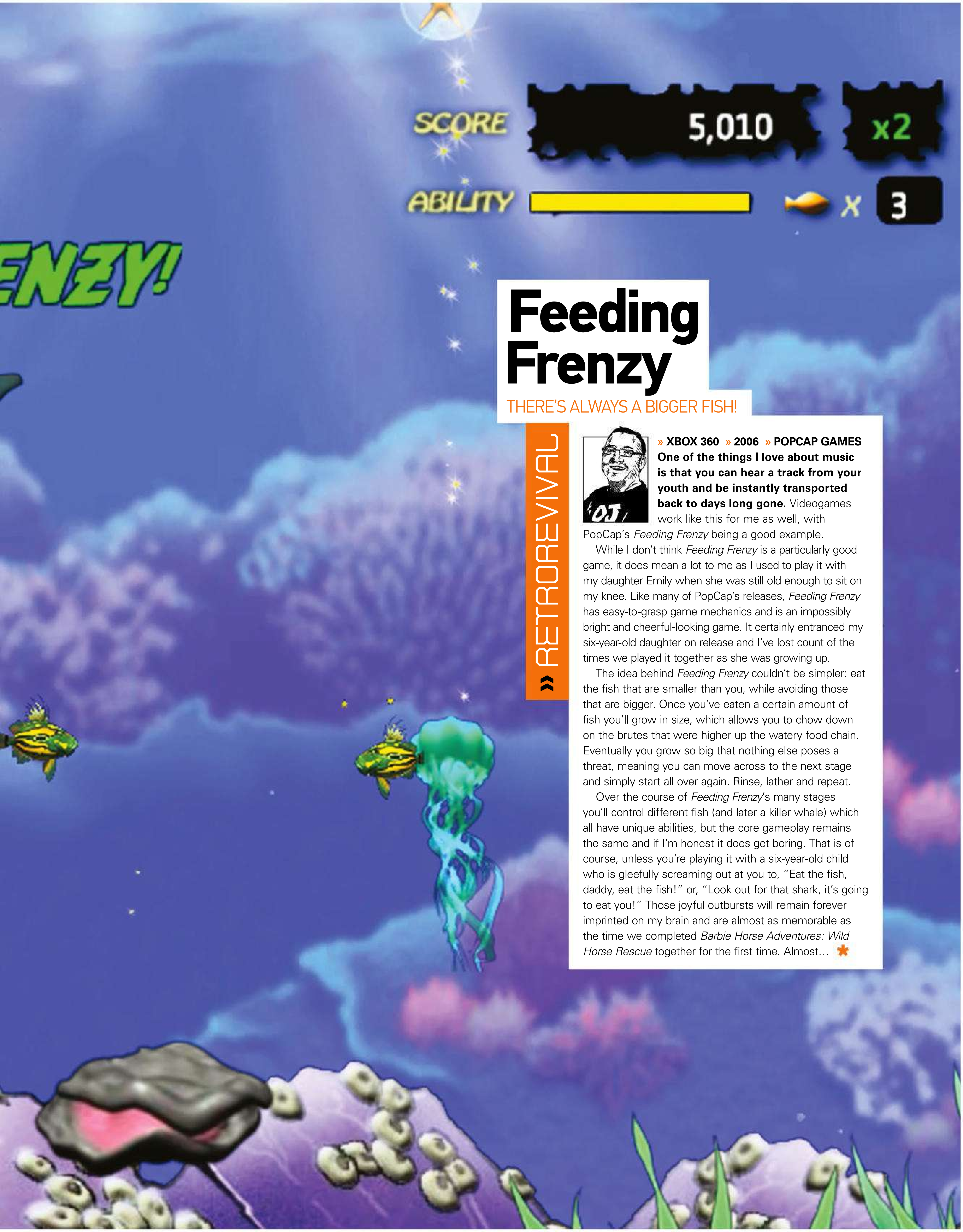


Feeding Frenzy

THERE'S ALWAYS A BIGGER FISH!

» XBOX 360 » 2006 » POPCAP GAMES

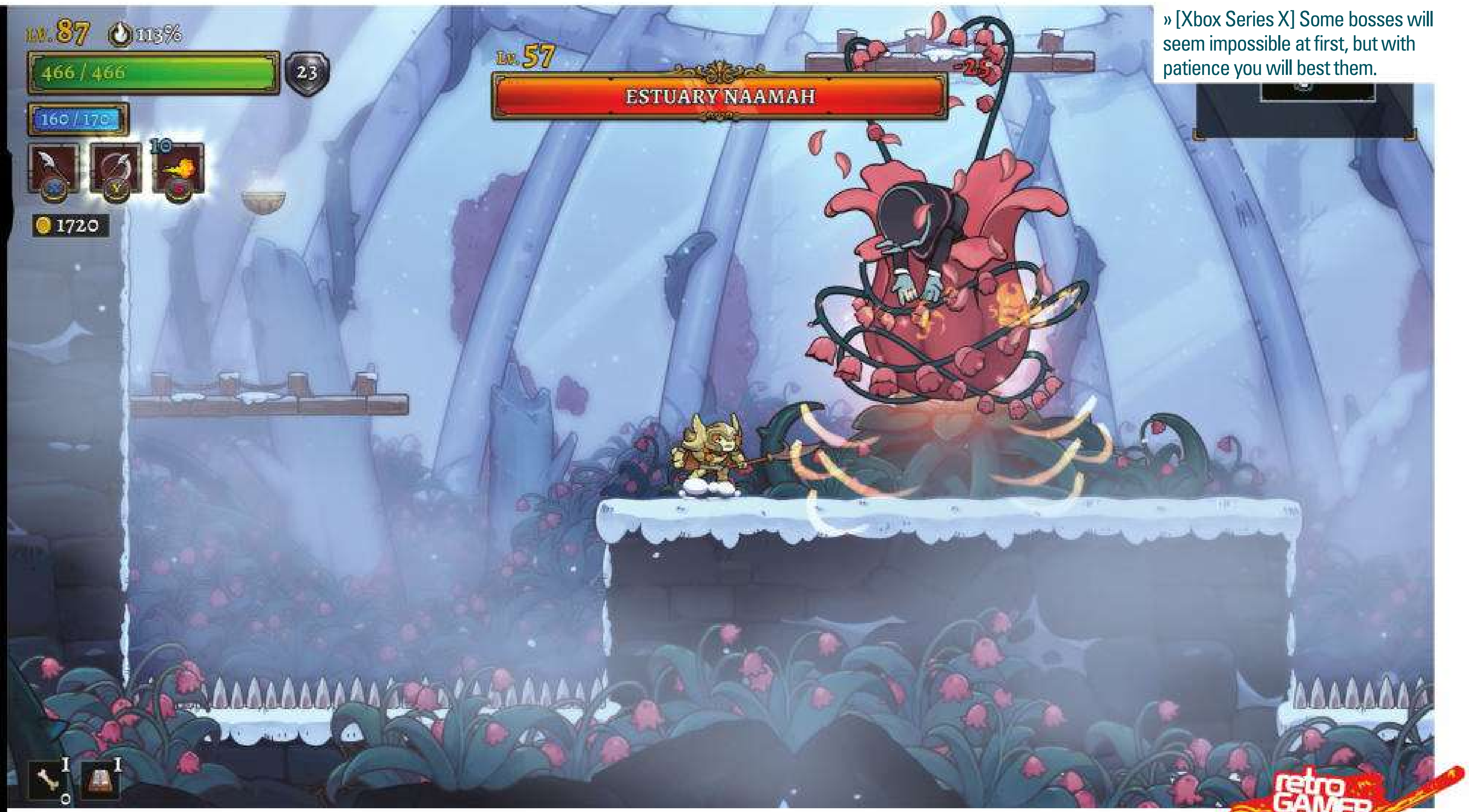
One of the things I love about music is that you can hear a track from your youth and be instantly transported back to days long gone. Videogames work like this for me as well, with PopCap's *Feeding Frenzy* being a good example.

While I don't think *Feeding Frenzy* is a particularly good game, it does mean a lot to me as I used to play it with my daughter Emily when she was still old enough to sit on my knee. Like many of PopCap's releases, *Feeding Frenzy* has easy-to-grasp game mechanics and is an impossibly bright and cheerful-looking game. It certainly entranced my six-year-old daughter on release and I've lost count of the times we played it together as she was growing up.

The idea behind *Feeding Frenzy* couldn't be simpler: eat the fish that are smaller than you, while avoiding those that are bigger. Once you've eaten a certain amount of fish you'll grow in size, which allows you to chow down on the brutes that were higher up the watery food chain. Eventually you grow so big that nothing else poses a threat, meaning you can move across to the next stage and simply start all over again. Rinse, lather and repeat.

Over the course of *Feeding Frenzy*'s many stages you'll control different fish (and later a killer whale) which all have unique abilities, but the core gameplay remains the same and if I'm honest it does get boring. That is of course, unless you're playing it with a six-year-old child who is gleefully screaming out at you to, "Eat the fish, daddy, eat the fish!" or, "Look out for that shark, it's going to eat you!" Those joyful outbursts will remain forever imprinted on my brain and are almost as memorable as the time we completed *Barbie Horse Adventures: Wild Horse Rescue* together for the first time. Almost… *

>> This month we rinse Rogue Legacy's sequel, play Taito's latest compilation, check out the new Cotton game and find out if the remaster of Makai Kingdom is worth playing



» [Xbox Series X] Some bosses will seem impossible at first, but with patience you will best them.

Rogue Legacy 2

INGENIOUS GENEALOGY

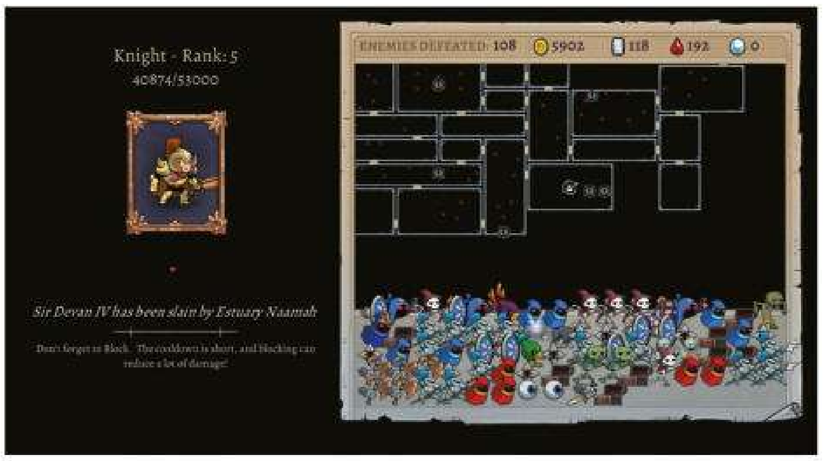
INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** XBOX SERIES X
- **ALSO ON:** PC, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** CELLAR DOOR GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** CELLAR DOOR GAMES
- **PLAYERS:** 1

The original *Rogue Legacy* impressed us mightily on release thanks to its ambitious concept, gorgeous sprite work and carefully constructed game mechanics. Cellar Door Games' sequel is finally with us and while it drops the detailed sprites of the 2013 original it otherwise improves on it in every possible way.

If you've never played *Rogue Legacy* before its concept is simple; you explore a labyrinthine procedurally generated castle with rooms that constantly shift with each new visit. Once your character finally dies you continue playing as one of their ancestors who gets to spend their hard-earned gold on new abilities before hopefully completing the quest their predecessor couldn't. Ancestors will often have genetic traits like colour blindness or flatulence that can affect play in sometimes critical ways, so keep that in mind when choosing them.

Rogue Legacy 2 dutifully sticks to this excellent concept, but pushes the boundaries far further than the original did. For starters there are numerous new class builds you can unlock that range from Boxers and Ronins to Gunslingers and Rangers. These new classes cater to a variety of play styles and your three descendants will always be a different class so there's always interesting choices for each new run you attempt. Favourites include the Chef who can inflict burn damage and return projectiles with their frying pan and the Astromancer who can create black holes that inflict insane damage, but all have



» [Xbox Series X] Here, you not only see what a badass you are, but also how much experience you currently have.

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Rogue Legacy* was released by Cellar Door Games in 2013 and spliced procedurally generated dungeons with a rounded range of characters that were defined by their genetic traits. It proved to be a big success for the developer and helped define the roguelike genre for years to come.

RELIC FOUND
Fate's Die

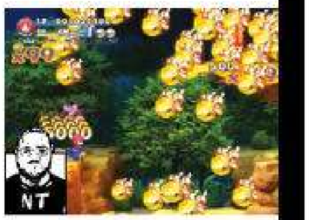
» [Xbox Series X] Relics are extremely powerful items, but be careful, not all are beneficial.

PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Taito Milestones

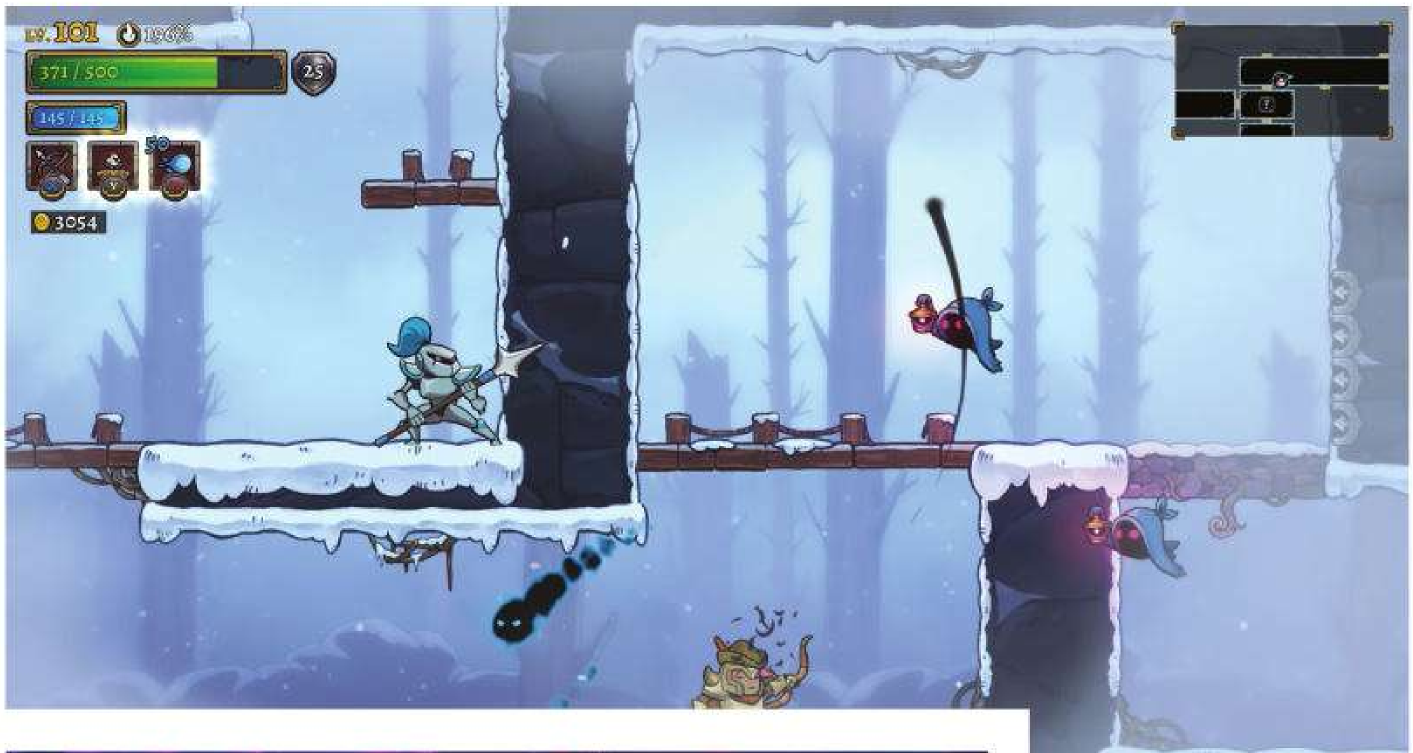
Yes it's a painfully slight collection at a high price, but I've still found it impossible to stop playing *Ninja Warriors*.



NICK

Cotton Fantasy

After playing through the original recently for an Ultimate Guide, it's been nice to see the little witch is as bonkers as ever.



» [Xbox Series X] There's a lot more environmental variety now which is greatly appreciated.

» [Xbox Series X] You'll need all of your skills to master tricky levels like this one.

✱ A VARIED LINEAGE

» In addition to 15 different character classes to experiment with, *Rogue Legacy 2* also expands on the many genetic traits that first appeared in the original game. Some like Algesia, which removes the brief immunity you have whenever you're hit, greatly ups the game's difficulty but others like being Clumsy can actually be beneficial as things will instantly break as you walk into them. Many are double-edged so Gigantism improves your reach and swing range but makes you an easier target, while Disattuned grants you 25% less health but grants you a tiny hitbox. Experimentation is key and combined with the available character classes you'll find that no two runs of *Rogue Legacy 2* are ever the same.

their uses and the classes are generally balanced well and a lot of fun to play around with.

Rogue Legacy's world has also been expanded and now features areas that include wintery wastelands with deep drifts of snow that hamper movement and a monster-infested town that will take several runs to successfully navigate. It gives the sequel a grandness the original didn't possess, but it's still cleverly constructed and never feels like a randomly generated selection of rooms that have been tacked together. Many of the new stages are also cut off and you'll need to find special Heirlooms in order to access them, often by reading subtle clues that are littered throughout the game world. Said Heirlooms require you to finish self-contained areas that highlight your newfound skills, whether it's the ability to double jump or dash through projectiles and they can be quite tricky to complete.

The difficulty factor that the series is infamous for is still present but it now feels like you have more control over your progression so you don't tend to hit ceilings as often as you did in the original. There are still certain stages that will truly test you and some of the later areas require intense platforming skills that will frustrate as many as they delight, but overall everything seems to flow that little bit easier in *Rogue Legacy 2*. Until of course you reach the game's many boss fights.

The bosses of *Rogue Legacy* were famed for their toughness and the ones here can be insanely difficult as well, particularly if you're new to the series (don't worry, previous knowledge of the first game isn't needed to enjoy this one). With a little patience and careful study of their attack patterns they are all eventually beatable – they just require plenty of practice… and dying. It's tremendously satisfying to finally down a boss that has been giving you grief, and you can speed up your progress by carefully choosing your purchases and killing as many enemies as possible beforehand, as each slain critter gains you experience which levels your character.

The breadth of *Rogue Legacy 2* is really quite something and it's one of the most entertaining roguelikes we've played for some time. It may be based on one of gaming's oldest genres, but *Rogue Legacy 2* finds plenty of ways to keep its gameplay fresh. Some will no doubt be put off by the constant deaths and the deft timing required to navigate certain areas, but if you're made of sterner stuff it's unlikely you'll get bored of the many challenges that *Rogue Legacy 2* throws at you. ✱

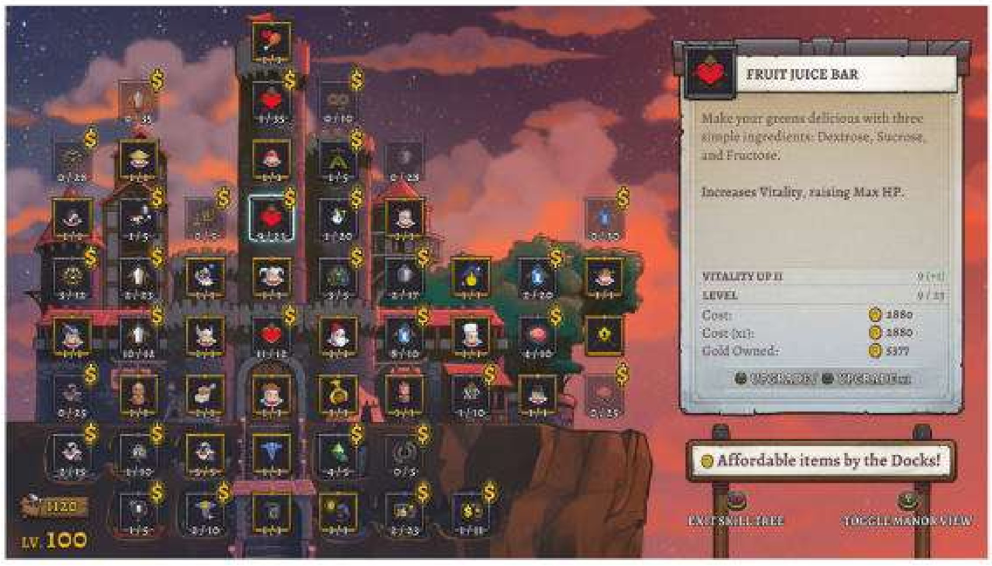
In A Nutshell

Yes it can be tough and yes it has lost its delightful retro aesthetic, but *Rogue Legacy 2* remains a killer sequel that dramatically improves on its predecessor. Give it a try.

» Score **90%**

» [Xbox Series X] Fairy Chests return and now prove even trickier to unlock.

» [Xbox Series X] As the village expands you'll gain access to armour, power-ups and much more.



FRUIT JUICE BAR

Make your greens delicious with three simple ingredients: Dextrose, Sucrose, and Fructose.

Increases Vitality, raising Max HP.

VITALITY UP II 9 (+1)
LEVEL 9 / 25
Cost: 1880
Cost (x1): 1880
Gold Owned: 5377

Affordable items by the Docks!

» [Xbox Series X] *Rogue Legacy 2*'s skill tree lets you build and unlock characters as you wish.

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Cotton Fantasy

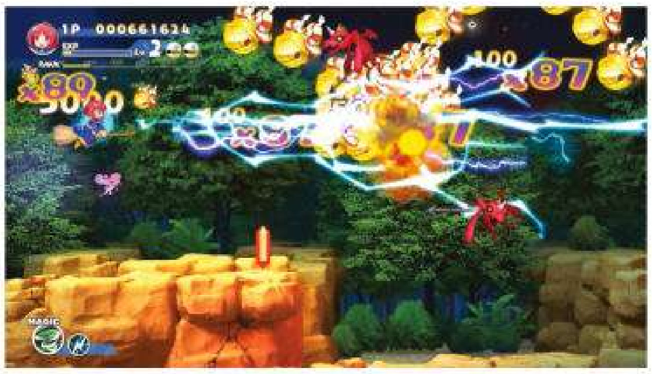
» System: Switch (tested), PS4 **» Buy it from:** Online, retail **» Buy it for:** £34.99

Cotton is back, and once again she's been lured into action by the fairy Silk, who promises her a buffet of Willow candy if she can figure out where all the Willow has gone. Fans of the series know what to expect by now – cute-'em-up action in a colourful fantasy world, with silly story skits between stages. Classic musical themes and visual elements return to ensure that old fans will soon feel right at home.

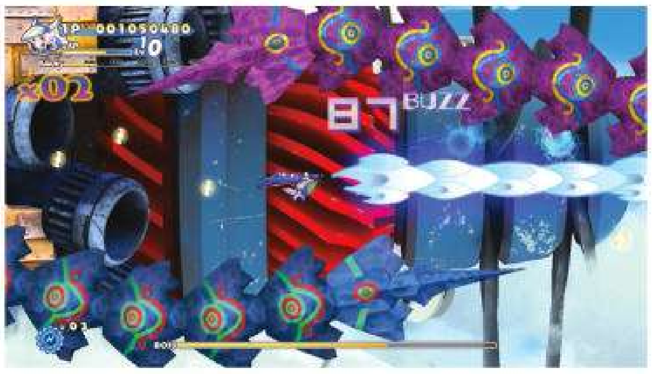
What's really nice about *Cotton Fantasy* is the variety of level designs. Whether you're going through a standard horizontally scrolling stage, a straight descent or something of a maze, repetition doesn't set in. Better yet, much of the progression is non-linear so there's little chance of you getting stuck on one stage. There are infinite continues if you just want to see the story, but you'll lose all of your score each time you use one, dashing any hopes of a place on the game's leaderboards. Better yet, there are a variety of ways to play based on which character you pick. Cotton's the traditional option, generating score items with her magical attacks, but other characters have very different gameplay styles – there's one which uses the bullet buzzing mechanics of *Psyvariar*, and even one that drops lives in favour of a timer. There are also three difficulty modes and a good amount of extras to unlock, so it will certainly keep you busy.

The one big issue we have is how busy the screen can get. It's not too bad if you're just playing to survive, but if you're generating lots of bells in pursuit of a high score the bullets can get a little lost. Still, the game offers enough fun that you will likely overlook that, especially as it's a fairly common complaint in the genre.

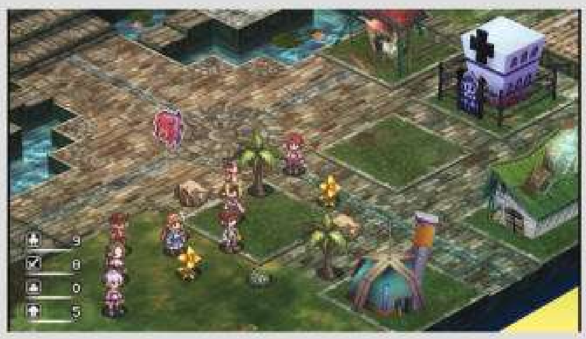
>> Score **83%**



» [Switch] This magic attack has caused the screen to fill a little, but it can get far busier.



» [Switch] If you like the risky gameplay of *Psyvariar*, Ria is the character to pick,



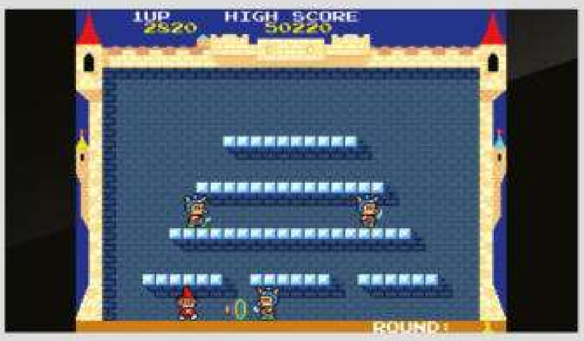
Makai Kingdom: Reclaimed And Rebound

» System: PC (tested), Switch **» Buy it for:** £16.99 (PC) £35.99+ (Switch) **» Buy it from:** Online, retail

If you are looking for an absorbing tactical RPG you'll find *Makai Kingdom* to be just the ticket. While we've not gotten around to playing the Switch copy Nis America sent us, which also includes *ZHP: Unlosing Ranger Vs Darkdeath Evilman*, the Steam version is very solid. If you've never played it before, it's essentially a cross between *Disgaea* and *Phantom Brave*. Initially released on PS2, this is actually an update of the PSP version, meaning it also includes Petta mode which is an additional story featuring the protagonist's daughter. Unfortunately, this is a rather simple remaster so the clunky controls are still there and it's not had much of a graphical overhaul. A shame as it deserves so much more.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **72%**



Taito Milestones

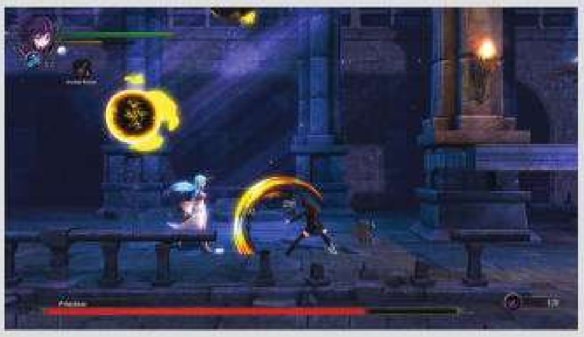
» System: Switch

» Buy it for: £34.99 **» Buy it from:** Online, retail

Don't be fooled by the name, many of the milestones that made Taito's name during the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties are frustratingly absent here. There's nothing celebratory about *Taito Milestones*, it's just a basic compilation of ten (admittedly fun games) that have been thrown together from the 20-odd Taito games that Hamster has published on Nintendo's eShop. Yes the presentation is solid with lots of tweakable options to experiment with and the likes of *Qix*, *The Ninja Warriors*, *Front Line*, *Space Seeker* and *Elevator Action* remain fun to play, but this still feels like a cynical cash grab. The Egret II Mini wasn't cheap but it does a far better job of celebrating Taito's rich legacy than this does.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **60%**



HunterX

» System: PC

» Buy it for: £11.39 **» Buy it from:** Steam

***HunterX* is a Metroidvania which casts you as Tsuki, a teenage devil hunter who must travel through the cracks between worlds – a theme which leads it to lean fairly heavily on the *Castlevania* influences, as you can probably imagine.** There's very little in *HunterX* that you won't have seen before, but the combat is enjoyable enough thanks to its satisfying parry and dash mechanics, and it's sufficiently well-made on the whole. Tsuki tends to die fairly easily, particularly during the game's boss fights when she can only sustain a few hits, so easily frustrated players may wish to steer clear of the game. It's best recommended to those looking for cheap thrills, or players that just can't pass up any reasonable Metroidvania.

NICK THORPE

>> Score **75%**

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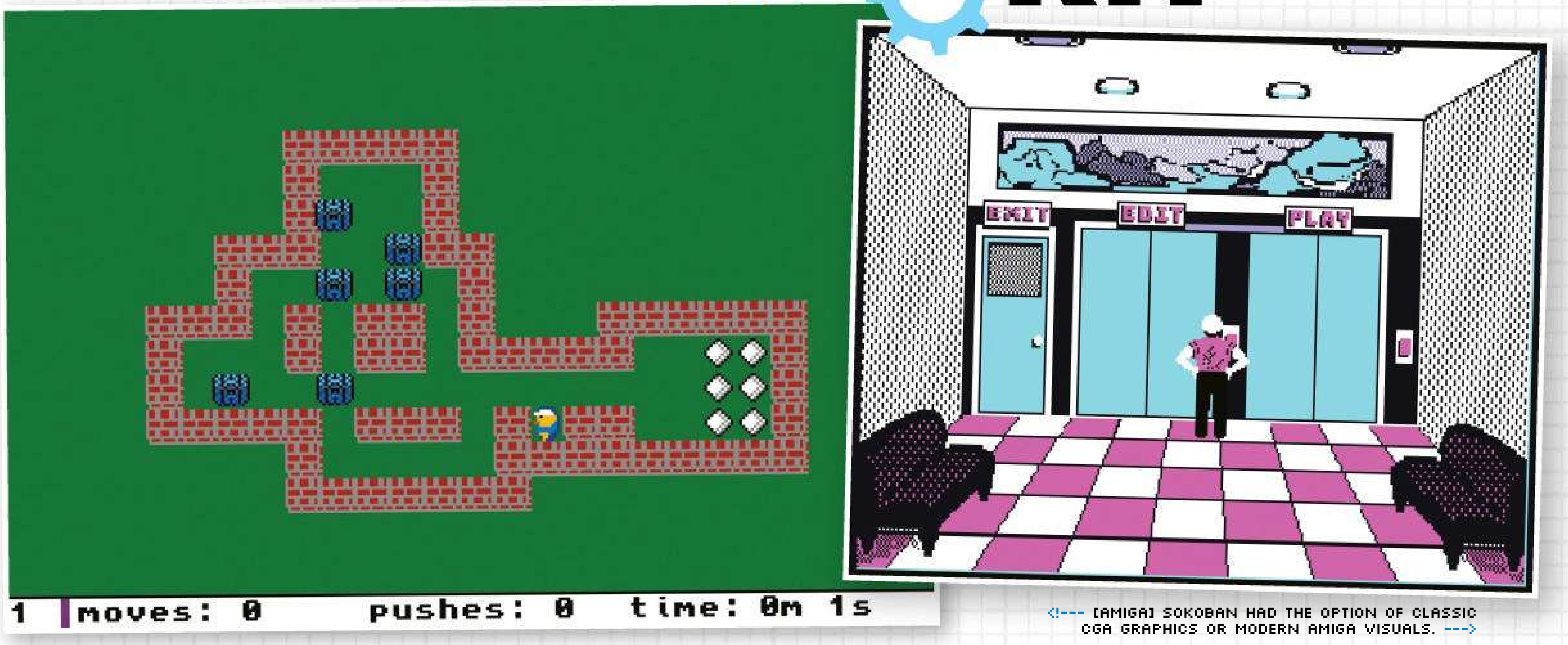
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<!--- [AMIGA] SOKOBAN HAD THE OPTION OF CLASSIC CGA GRAPHICS OR MODERN AMIGA VISUALS. --->

<INTRO> REGULAR READERS WILL KNOW THAT I TOOK OVER THIS COLUMN FROM THE SADLY MISSED JASON KELK. AT THE RECENT REVISION PARTY, C64 DISKMAG VANDALISM NEWS #72 (BIT.LY/VANDALISM72) WAS RELEASED, DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF JASON – WHO WROTE GREAT HOMEBREW TITLES HIMSELF, INCLUDING HAMMER DOWN, WHICH IS SOON TO BE PUBLISHED POSTHUMOUSLY. JASON WOULD HAVE LOVED THE RECENT AMIGAMEJAM AND THE FORTHCOMING TITLES PREVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE'S COLUMN, SO DO TAKE A LOOK. </INTRO>

<!--- DANTE HAS ADDED THE NES SOUNDTRACK TO HIS PORT OF GREEN BERET AS DEVELOPMENT CONTINUES. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

AMIGAMEJAM 2021

<INTRO> ORGANISED BY AMIGACAMMY, THE THEME OF PORTS LED TO SOME SPECTACULAR NEW AMIGA GAMES AND A FANTASTIC RESULTS LIVESTREAM </INTRO>

<BODY> **"I started organising game contests for Amiga in 2009," Moya Jackie McGeough (aka AmigaCammy) tells us.** "I decided to shorten the name to AmiGameJam so we could have a different theme each year. I reached out to a few people who are producing new products for Amiga, and I was very glad that they were able to contribute what they could."

AmigaBill's stream started with a video presenting the sponsors (Retream, Amiworx, Checkmate, Bitmap Soft and Mutation Software) and prizes in two categories – Classic Amiga and Next Generation. RetroHitch and Glen Planamento (from Glen's Video Show) gave insightful reviews of each game as Bill played them (or showed a video), and Moya tallied up the scores. The legendary RJ Mical was also on hand with commentary and anecdotes.

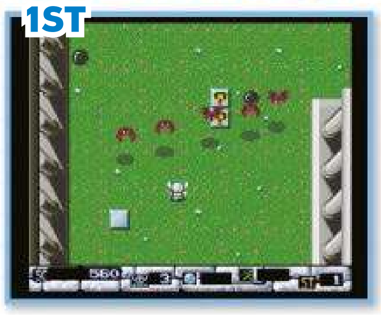
Dante Mendes wowed the crowd with *Green Beret* and *CastlevaniaAGA* (based on the Sharp X68000 *Akumajou Dracula*). Dante has continued working on both titles, saying, "The effort to get *Green Beret* running on A500 was big and the pressure was huge. It's a high-profile Konami game to do with only one developer in such a tight deadline. *Castlevania* is more of a demo to show Scorpion Engine's AGA capabilities, it follows the layout of the first level close enough and the music (by Estrayk/Capsule^Scoopex) is very faithful."

Jotd entered three brilliant arcade ports – *Amidar* (**RG**231), *Pac-Man* and *Ms Pac-Man* – all playable on Amiga 500. "I choose games that I like, and that I can playtest to death without being bored," we're told. "I started creating a mock-up of *Pac-Man* the very same day that AmiGameJam started. Just a coincidence. [For *Ms Pacman*] I just had to tweak the AI very slightly, added moving bonus and extra mazes, and cutscenes. Andrzej Dobrowolski recreated all the intro and cut sequence tunes exactly as Amiga modules."

Hoffman (Ian Ford) took the honours with *Knightmare*, converted from MSX in just six months. "That includes the disassembly, rewriting it in 68000 assembly and doing all the music and sound effects," Ian says. "Thankfully, Toni Galvez, who remastered

THE FAB FIVE

1ST

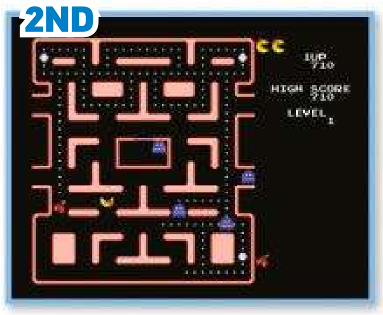


KNIGHTMARE

Hoffman

<"I picked *Knightmare* to learn disassembly and also because I thought the game was fun, a little different and a good addition to the Amiga.">

2ND



MS PAC-MAN

Jotd

<"I wanted to code *Pac-Man* for months. *Amidar* was chosen because it was similar to *Pac-Man*, *Ms Pac-Man* was just a logical follow-up.">

NEW GAMES NEEDED

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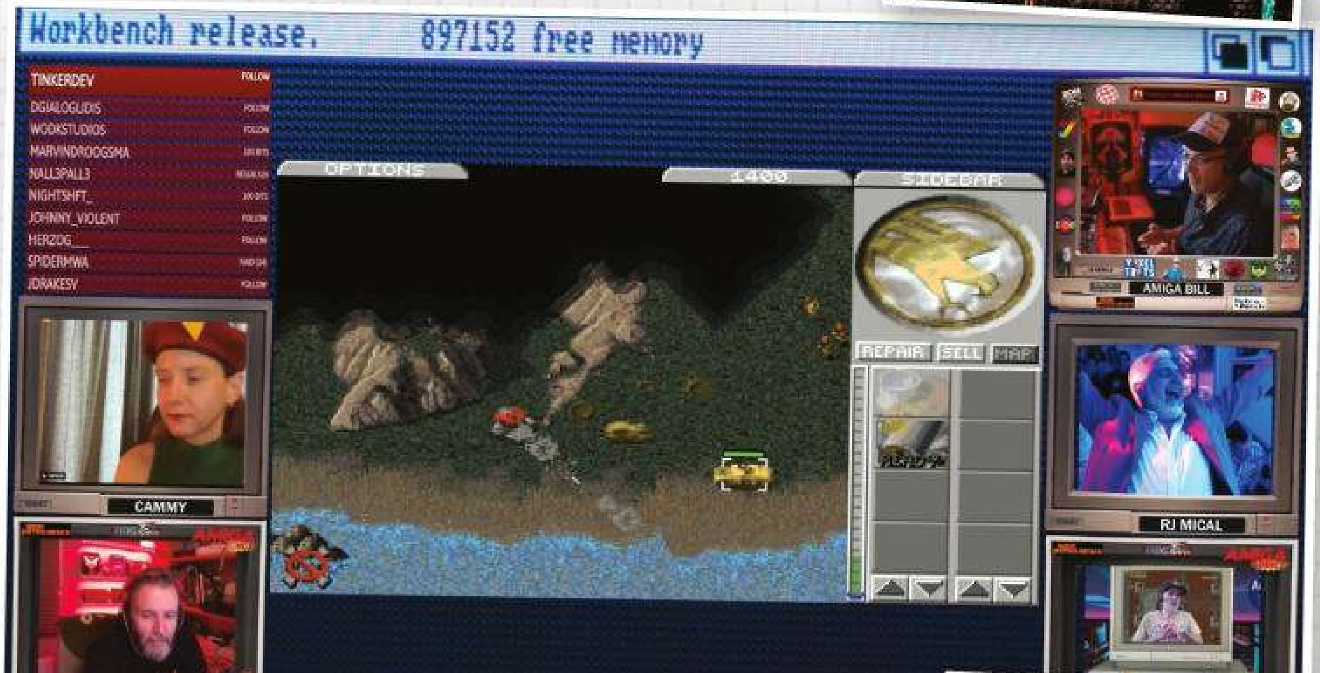
SCORE-016100 TIME 259 STAGE 1
PLAYER
ENEMY
P-051
P-01

<!--- AMIGABILL SHOWING A VIDEO OF VANILLACONQUER DURING THE LIVESTREAM. --->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DGIALOGUDIS
WOOKSTUDIOS
MARVINDROOGSMA
NALL3PALL3
NIGHTSHFT_
JOHNNY_VIOLENT
HERZOG_
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OPTIONS
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REPAIR
SELL
MAP
CAMMY
HITCH
AMIGA BILL
RJ MICAL

AMIGA PORT BY
NEESO GAMES

PLAYER1
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the graphics to Amiga 32 colours, was able to work concurrently alongside that. The original game had a structure for hidden bonuses, so it was quite easy to hijack that and expand upon it. They did throw up some weird bugs but thankfully nothing too difficult to resolve. The focus was always on just making sure the game was complete, which is fun and rewarding in itself. It meant we weren't worrying about a deadline and could focus on making it the best we could."

"I'll be running the AmiGameJam contest again in a few months' time with a new theme," concludes Moya, which is bound to please fans of the system. The stream can be replayed at bit.ly/billjam, and the competition page is itch.io/jam/amigamejam. More interviews can be found at the **Retro Gamer** forum thread – bit.ly/hb-234 </BODY>

<INTRO> THE CREATORS OF THE BEST GAMES COMMENT </INTRO>

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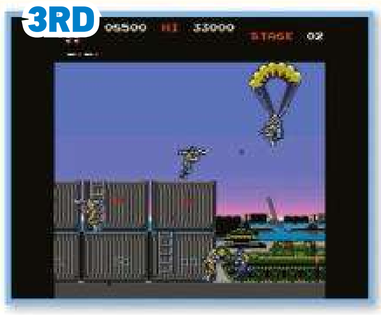
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STAGE 02

GREEN BERET

Dante

< "The Scorpion Engine seems well-suited to platform games. *Green Beret* was never released on Amiga, a 2017 attempt never saw the light of day." >

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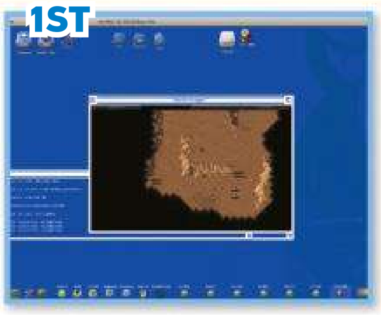
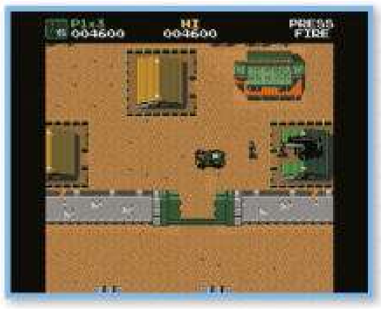


NEXT GENERATION – VANILLACONQUER

Arczii

< Requiring RTG, this was controversial as it was a 'next-gen' entry. RetroHitch wasn't sure it was in the spirit of things. >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AMIGACAMMY'S FAVOURITE – JACKAL

Neeso Games

< "I was working on a racing game and since in *Jackal* you drive a Jeep, I extended it with a machine gun and missiles." >

0082750
x2
ROUND03
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NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> NOW ORGANISED BY FORMAT, HERE ARE THE LATEST NEWS BYTES TO ENJOY </INTRO>

< **Amiga:** Jotd's *Scramble500* adds a rather neat two-player mode. Play it at jotd666.itch.io/scramble-500 />

< **Amstrad CPC:** Mananuk has converted *Paleto Jones* and *Black Sea – Treasure Hunters*. Read more at mananuk.itch.io />

< **Atari XL/XE:** *Gacek*, a brilliant *Bombjack* clone bit.ly/gacek-atari recently won the ABBUC 2021 competition. />

< **C64:** Sarah Jane Avory released the topical *Strikeback*, which is raising funds for Ukraine. Find out more at sarahjaneavory.itch.io/strikeback-c64 />

< **Mega Drive:** *Demons Of Asteborg* sequel *Astebros* bit.ly/astebros was funded through Kickstarter and features roguelike platforming. It's also coming to Steam and Switch. />

< **PICO-8:** Gradual Games has converted *Star Raiders*. You can play it at gradualgames.itch.io/star-raiders Carl Chimes has also published his amazing *Nebulus* port. More at carlc27843.itch.io/nebulus />

< **PLUS/4:** *Bruce Lee* finally jumped onto Plus/4. More at bit.ly/bruce-plus4 />

< **VIC-20:** Andy of Hewco released *Mars Lander* hewco64.itch.io/mars-landing-vic20 for the unexpanded VIC-20. />

< **ZX Spectrum:** Team Moritz's *Beethoven's Revenge* uses AGDmaxi and features great music. More at zxamaze.itch.io/ John Davies' *Road Trippin' 2022* tours the UK's coast starting in sunny Skegness. You can play it by visiting snagultoof.itch.io/rt2022 />

< **VARIOUS:** Beaver Of The Black River Games' limited-edition tapes support C64 and Plus/4. *Tenebra* from Haplo is a light-based puzzler. Alessio Scanderebech's *The Nightland* mixes physical board game and computer game, with board, pawns and dice. bobr.games has more info. />

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CHAMPION CODER

JUAN J MARTINEZ

<INTRO> THIS PROLIFIC 8-BIT CODER HAS BEEN STREAMING HIS RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON TWITCH </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: BRISTOL, ENGLAND WEBSITE: USEBOX.NET/JJM, TWITCH.TV/MRREIDRAC FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, MSX, ZX SPECTRUM RECENTLY CODED: UCHÜSEN GAMMA (MSX), BRICK RICK: GRAVEYARD SHIFT (ZX SPECTRUM) DEVELOPING: HYPERDRIVE (AMSTRAD CPC), OUTPOST (ZX SPECTRUM)/>

WHEN DID YOU START PROGRAMMING HOMEBREW, JUAN?

<In 2014 I submitted a game to SpeccyJam (make a PC game with Speccy graphical specs in a week). I had a lot of fun, and I started looking to see how hard it would be to make an actual Spectrum game./>

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE SYSTEMS YOU HAVE PROGRAMMED?

<All the systems have something interesting, once you start to understand their design. C64 has great hardware support for sprites and scroll, MSX has dedicated video memory and a nice BIOS, CPC has a beautiful palette, Speccy attributes allow for speed and neat tricks. All a matter of making a game that is a good fit for the system./>

WHY HAVE YOU MADE SOME TOOLS AND PROJECTS OPEN-SOURCE?

<I have learned a lot by reading resources that other people put online. It is my way of contributing back. Hopefully, it will help others to make their own games. My games are always available to download and play for free, but for some I like to have a physical edition. Loading a new game into your 8-bit from original media in 2022, isn't that amazing?/>

WHAT DID YOU MAKE OF THE RECENT COMMODORE 64 NIGHT KNIGHT CONVERSION?

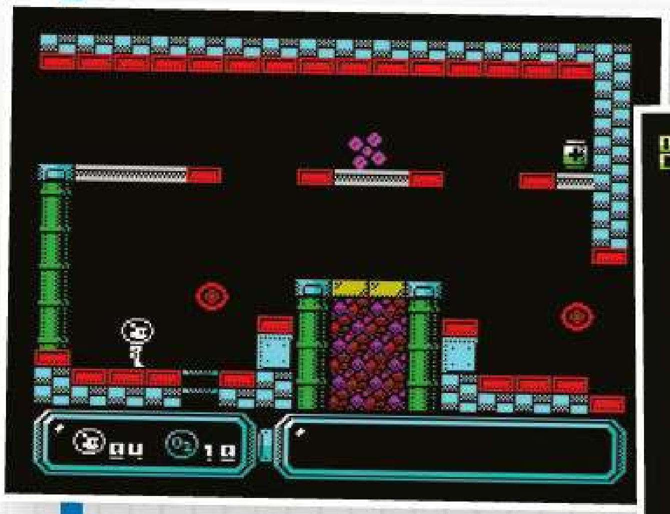
<Aris contacted me with a finished game, reverse-engineered from playing the MSX version. I gave Aris some pointers and sprites, so it felt closer to the original. After refinement, I gave him my permission to release (including a physical edition with my publisher)./>

ARE THERE ANY PLANS FOR MORE GAMES SET IN MAGICA?

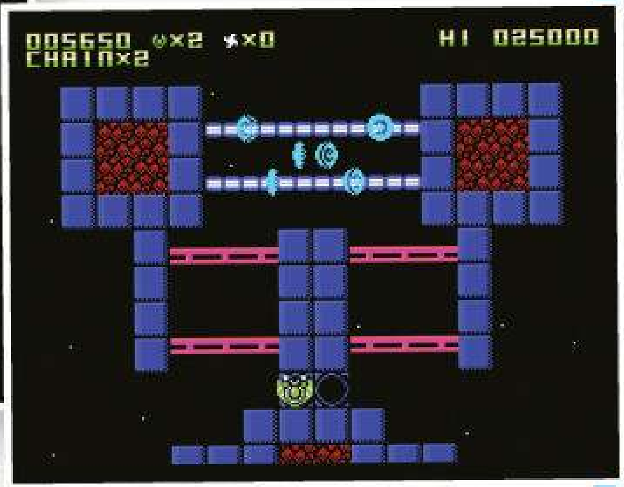
<Continuing *Rescuing Orc* is still in my list of projects. I have been focussed on Z80, so going back to C64 and 6502 is not easy. It will happen, eventually./>

HOW IS AMSTRAD SHOOT-'EM-UP HYPERDRIVE PROGRESSING?

<The game engine is almost complete, and I play-tested the finished first stage with positive feedback. The technical part has been challenging./>



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] NEW PROJECT OUTPOST WILL BE FOR 48K SPECTRUMS, AFTER GRAVEYARD SHIFT REQUIRED 128K. --->



<!--- [MSX] KEEP SHOOTING ENEMIES TO INCREASE YOUR CHAIN COUNTER IN USÜCHEN GAMMA. --->

DATA BURST

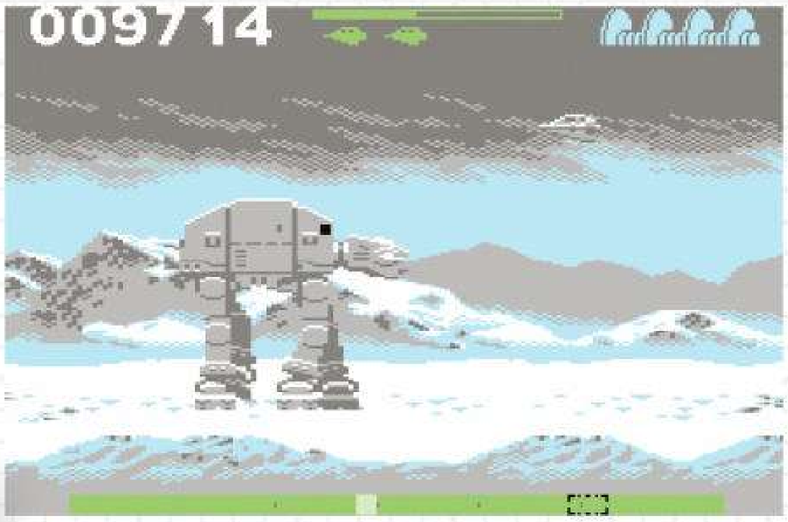
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

<INFO BY: MEGASTYLE (CHRIS STANLEY, RUNE SPAANS, ROY WIDDING) FORMAT: C64 PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD VISIT: MEGASTYLE.ITCH.IO/ESB-BY-MEGASTYLE/>

<BODY> **Using your trusty snowspeeder, you must defend the shield generators protecting the Rebel base on Hoth from attack.** Based on the Atari 2600 classic, the first wave pits you against AT-ST walkers. But from level two you face probe droids and the massive AT-AT walkers, as they slowly stomp across the landscape. These take multiple shots to destroy, either direct to the head or with a one in three chance of damaging the body. However, flashing hatches open periodically and a direct hit on those can easily destroy the massive vehicle. Your energy is shown at the top of the screen and replenishes at the end of each level and if you survive without damage for 60 seconds you'll gain the Force, making you invulnerable for a brief time. Once you master all eight levels you'll be treated to an end sequence before the game loops around.

Megastyle's game is beautifully presented, with a PETSCII on-screen manual, introductory bitmap and attract sequence. Superb renditions of the John Williams themes are included as well. The AT-ATs are exceptionally well animated, with other great sprites on display. The major omission is the ability to land and repair your snowspeeder. The new level structure works well, with clever use of colour to create changing times of day/weather, but not being able to repair makes things tougher and more repetitive than the Atari original. </BODY>

SCORE: 85%

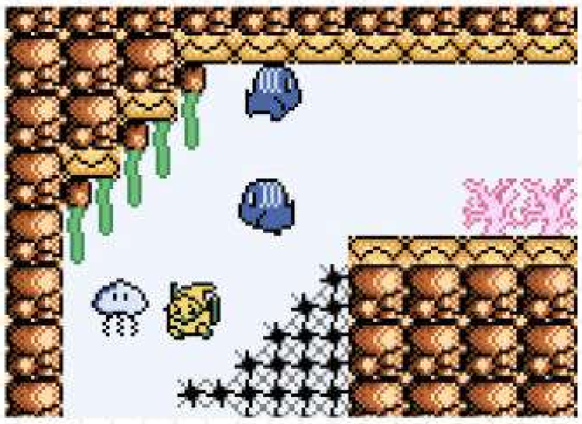


<!--- [C64] THE HATCH IS OPEN, BUT THE AT-AT'S HEAD CAN STILL BLOCK YOUR SHOT.--->

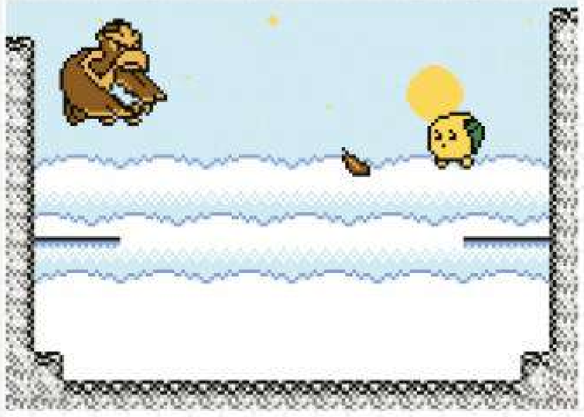
STAR WARS
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
Spark

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] YOUR HERO IS INCREDIBLY SLUGGISH UNDERWATER MEANING ENEMIES AND HAZARDS ARE TOUGH TO AVOID. --->



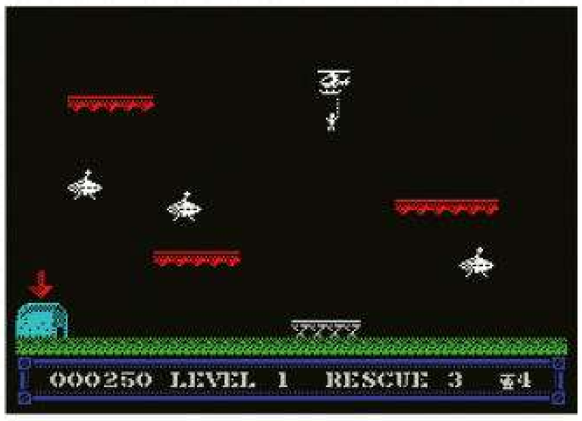
<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] SOME BOSSES SIMPLY CHASE YOU, BUT THIS ONE FIGHTS. IFFY COLLISION MAKES DODGING THAT FEATHER QUITE HARD. --->

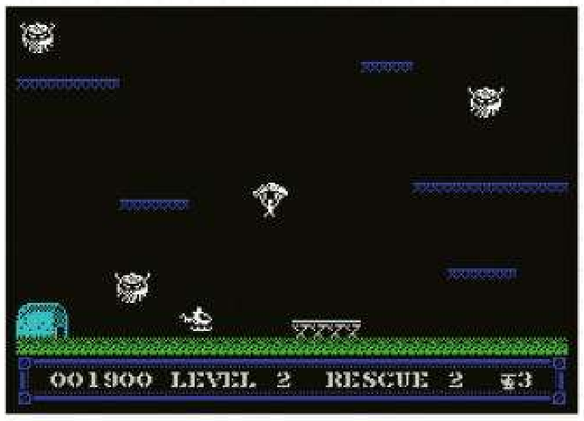
POWA!

<INFO **BY:** AIGUANACHEIN (SERGEEO, IVAN MIGUEL) **FORMAT:** GAME BOY COLOR
PRICE: $3.50 (DOWNLOAD), €49.99+ (PHYSICAL VERSION) **VISIT:** FIRSTPRESSGAMES.COM />

<BODY> **It's a good job *Powa!* comes with an Easy mode option as it's one hard game!** Impending doom is approaching the town where our hero lives so he sets off on a quest through four varied locations to defeat it. *Powa!* looks absolutely gorgeous with some stunning pixel art (it runs on Zalo's ZGB engine), neat animation and fun character designs. It's also complemented by some jolly bouncy tunes that perfectly match the cute on-screen action. Unfortunately, while it looks and sounds the part, *Powa!* is let down by its insanely high difficulty level. Play Normal mode and you'll soon rinse your four lives and three continues due to unfair game design that often hides enemies and hazards before you can react to them. There's also questionable collision detection at times. Easy mode offers infinite lives and time but it's still gets frustrating. </BODY>

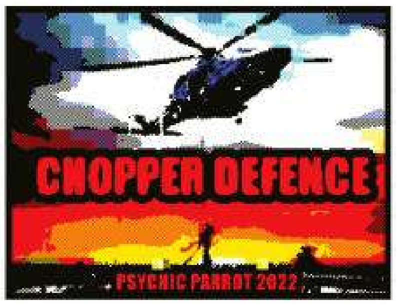
SCORE: **65%**





CHOPPER DEFENCE

<INFO **BY:** PSYCHICPARROT (DESIGN), QUANTUMSHEEP (LOADING SCREEN), DAMIENG (STANDSTILL FONT)
FORMAT:ZX SPECTRUM **PRICE:** $1 CAD OR MORE
VISIT: PSYCHICPARROT.ITCH.IO/CHOPPER-DEFENCE />



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] LOADING SCREEN ARTIST QUANTUMSHEEP RECENTLY ORGANISED A SPECTRUM CHARITY BUNDLE FOR SPECIAL EFFECT. --->

<BODY> **Created with Jonathan Cauldwell's MPAGD, this mixes elements of *Choplifter* and *Jetpac* together.** Pick up the parachutists when they land, then ferry them to the hangar – flying enemies will kill you or the parachutists on contact. Rescue enough guys, shoot all the enemies and land on your helipad to complete the level. This is a well-made title that is quite addictive. Title music is effective, but in-game sound is basic. It never quite hits the highs of Ultimate's 16K classic and lacks depth, but it's certainly worth a quick blast. </BODY>

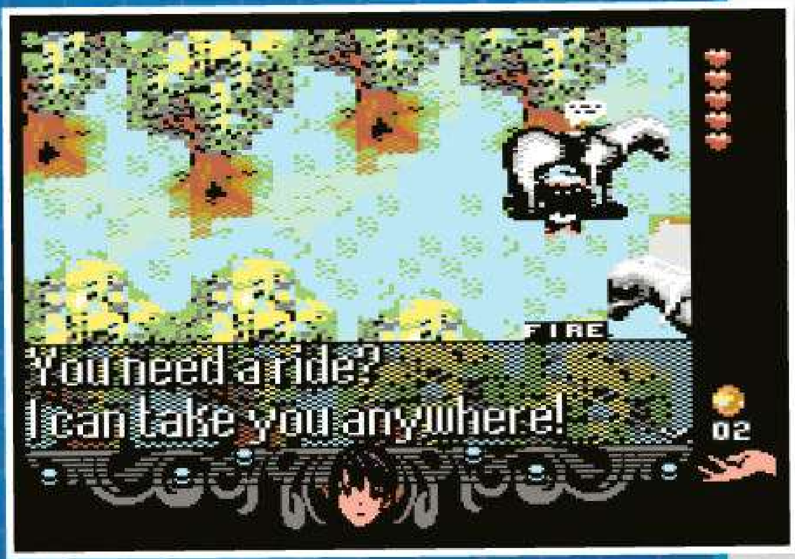
SCORE: **79%**

PROCESSING

<INTRO> THIS MONTH SEES US LOOKING FORWARD TO A LOST ISLAND AND A NEW AMSTRAD CPC FIGHTING GAME </INTRO>

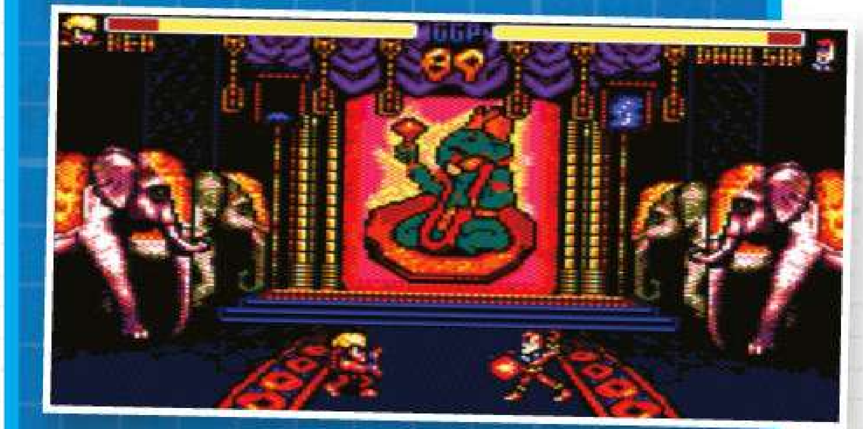
<BODY> ***Lykia: The Lost Island* is from Puls4r, responsible for *Alpharay* and *Pet Rescue*.** Nora is sent to collect fruit – and unleashes a spell that affects the whole island. After the beautiful intro, Nora can interact with characters, use objects, and ride a talking horse to undo the spell. This is graphically reminiscent of classic SNES RPGs with a day/night cycle and clouds floating by. Digital download will be free, with disk (Psytronik) and cartridge (Protovision) versions supporting extra hardware. Read more at bit.ly/lykiac64 or try the prologue (*Nathan's Journey*) from bit.ly/lykia-prologue

Alain Plantevin (MaitrejoeGGP) shares details on *Mighty Street Fighter*. "The game will have nine different settings and several tunes by JackGGP," Alain tells us. "I am currently balancing speed/resistance/damage of the characters. Gameplay like *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* is the goal, but more evolved, with special moves and detailed animations, and *Street Fighter II*-themed super deformed characters. I've only been programming for one year, I'm doing my best and it takes me a lot of time between graphics and programming in Z80 assembler." </BODY>



You need a ride?
I can take you anywhere!

<!--- [C64] NORA USES A TALKING HORSE TO TRAVEL AROUND THE SECOND ISLAND, WITH PLAY SWITCHING TO A ZOOMED-OUT MAP VIEW. --->



<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] KEN UNLEASHES A FIREBALL ON DHALSIM IN MIGHTY STREET FIGHTER. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

ONLINE ANTICS

Looking back at our networked favourites

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

When this magazine launched, online multiplayer gaming was still a minority pursuit and – on consoles at least – was still a new and exciting feature. Today, online multiplayer is in everything from the Switch versions of SNES games to colossal hits like *Fortnite*. With that in mind, we reminisced about some of our formative experiences of taking on the world.

NICK

Can you remember the first game you played online? Mine would have been *ChuChu Rocket!* on the Dreamcast. It was good fun, but it has a lot more lag than when you play offline.

DARRAN

I would have played *Quake* on the PC but I didn't enjoy it as my PC was rubbish at the time and I was constantly getting trounced by my opponents.

TIM

For me it was *Burnout 3: Takedown*. I used to share a house with a guy who worked on *XBM* so he had his Xbox and broadband working. It was actually really exciting, especially when I won a few races – heart-pounding stuff.

DARRAN

I know it wasn't the first online service, but there's a lot to be said for the slickness and overall brilliance of Xbox Live. I joined the beta which included a headset and a disc of games and I was really excited. Mel was like, "You wear a headset every day at work, why would you want to use that to play games?" She just didn't understand. So what was your Dreamcast experience like, Nick?

NICK

Awesome, but limited. It was obviously a bit clunky but the bigger problem was that later games tended to get online functions stripped out for their PAL release. *Phantasy Star Online* let me stay up until 2:00am exploring caves with a French guy I'd never met though, and those kinds of experiences are priceless.

» [PC] Maybe Darran should try *Quake* again, his PC's probably up to the job now.

DARRAN

One of my friends got massively into *Phantasy Star Online* and would tell me about running up £300 phone bills and waking up with his keyboard stuck to his face. Did you ever experience the online nonsense of *PSO*, Tim? I caught up with it on Xbox.

TIM

I'm kind of jealous that I didn't get online much earlier. It was 2007 when I got an Xbox 360 and was finally able to play online. No, I've not played *PSO*, but I might start playing the free one that's on Xbox now.

DARRAN

You missed out, Tim. I absolutely adored Xbox Live because it felt like such a giant step up after all the faff from playing games like *Duke Nukem 3D* and *X-Wing Alliance* online. My friend Mike and I absolutely hammered the Xbox, playing games like *Ghost Recon*, *Project Gotham Racing 2* and various *Rainbow Six* games.

NICK

It's funny that nobody's mentioned *Halo* yet. I remember my housemates dropping an ethernet cable from a bedroom window to the living room for a LAN game of Halo 3, but I don't think any of us actually played it online.

DARRAN

Oh man. *Halo 2* was insane online. The first one was brilliant

POS 2/6
LAP 1/2
TOOK 1st +300
BOOST NUDGE!
1st
NEAR MISS
MPH 162

» [Xbox] *Burnout 3: Takedown* must have been a heck of an introduction to Xbox Live for Tim.

PLAYER 1
K.O.
56
PLAYER 2
Yun
Chun-Li
SUPER!
SUPER!

» [Xbox 360] This match didn't actually take place online. You can tell because Ken's not there.

» [Xbox] *Halo 2* was a big draw for Xbox Live – Microsoft even sold a separate multiplayer map disc.

0: 01
mickscre
HKT303
Computer
Computer
012
046
001
013

» [Dreamcast] Nick still plays *ChuChu Rocket!* online now and then, thanks to the DreamPi.

Weather Storm 08:23
Chronosphere 05:53

» [PC] Nick and some other Sonic fans used to play *Red Alert 2* regularly, though it went unmentioned here.

locally, but Xbox Live took it to another level and I spent way too much time playing it. Were you a *Halo* fan, Tim?

TIM

I did play some *Halo 2* online with my aforementioned housemate. But he always thought it'd be funny to shoot me in the back, the damn team-killing twonk. But maybe that was better than getting shot in the face by the opposing team – I wasn't very good at it. Some years later I played a good bit of *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare*, and I got OK at that. But then the *Street Fighter IV* update came out, and that was fantastic.

DARRAN

That was the *Arcade Edition*, right? Man that was superb, I got bored of playing against constant Kens in the end, but it was brilliant while it lasted. What was the appeal for you, Tim?

TIM

Jump back, hadouken, hadouken, hadouken… heh. When you weren't fighting against Ken, it was the sheer number of players and different characters to try to get your head around. The victories felt so good, plus you could feel yourself improving with nearly every fight.

NICK

Did you ever get any memorable abuse from sore losers? I once got called a "skullywag" by a salty *Virtua Fighter 5 Final Showdown* opponent, which amused me.

TIM

One guy left some abuse about me throwing him all the time. I was playing as Abel in *SFIV*, that's what he does – he throws.

DARRAN

Most of the rage I used to experience online was playing *Magic Online*. Thank the lord *MTG Arena* doesn't allow for chat.

NICK

It's kind of amazing that people can still be annoying with the emotes though. Oops, good game, good game, good game. Oops.

DARRAN

Lol, I do that when I've just trashed someone. Does that make me a terrible person?

TIM

That would be rage-inducing for sure.

NICK

Maybe, but then I've definitely been guilty of roping in my time. Online gaming: it makes monsters of us all.

TIM

Oops. *

> "I once got called a "skullywag" by a salty Virtua Fighter 5 Final Showdown opponent"
>
> NICK THORPE

READERS REACT

Readers share their first online gaming experiences

Steven Hall

My first online gaming experience was *Doom 3* on the Xbox. I had just moved home and got broadband for the first time. I played some co-op levels with a player called DarkVagrant78. They became my first Xbox friend and are still on my friends list 16 years later! [Nice - Ed]

Matt Bloor

It was playing *Duke Nukem 3D*, using Kali95 to tunnel the IPX/SPX local multiplayer data online using TCP/IP. That was the beginning of my online FPS journey on PC, which later gave way for online console gaming only when the PS2 came out.

Dr Goggles

My first online gaming experience was playing MUDs/MUSHs on Unix workstations at uni in 1992. Text only, but I got to interact with people from around the world for the first time in my life.

Paul Matthias

Worms Armageddon on PC, around 2010. There was still a small community of hardcore players and I loved every second of it. Everyone was so supportive and I miss it so much.

Arctic Panda Popz

The Xbox 360 really opened my eyes to online gaming. It made it so easy to play with friends, Voice chat. Playing co-op *Gears Of War* with my dad is a memory I'll never forget.

Gerrit Gossmann

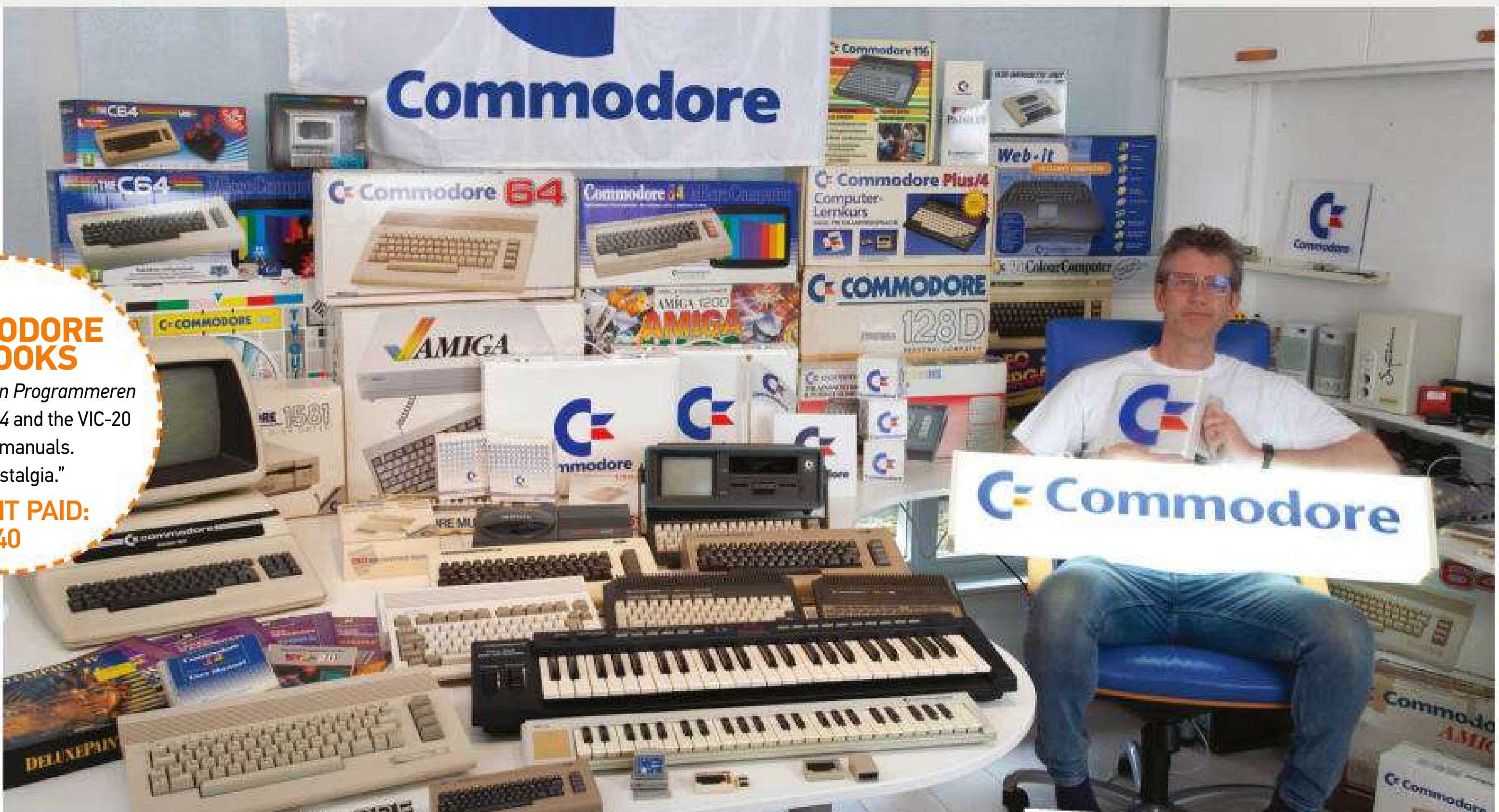
Phantasy Star Online was my first online experience and it was amazing. Playing together, chatting, trading weapons only with trust. I even played with Japanese people who could understand basic English or communicate with them via the symbol chat. Thank you Sega and thank you mom, for paying the phone bill!

Kamal Zamer

Warcraft II on my 486 PC, probably over a 9600 baud modem! You know, before Battle.net existed.

Pete Adamson

Mario Kart DS. I went around the shops in Edinburgh to check if they had Wi-Fi. Epic stuff. Also got a Wi-Fi adapter. Love the Xbox Live stuff too but DS is where is started for me.



COMMODORE 64 BOOKS

"The books *Leren Programmeren – Commodore 64* and the VIC-20 and C64 manuals. Pure nostalgia."

AMOUNT PAID: €40

THE COMMODORE COLLECTOR

Dustin Vogel's passion for the American manufacturer runs deep

BIO

NAME:
Dustin Vogel

LOCATION:
Almere, The Netherlands

FAVOURITE GAME:
Boulder Dash

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Commodore 64

COLLECTION WORTH:
€12,500

INSTAGRAM:
thecommodorecollector

TROLLIE WALLIE

"One of the many games I really love, even though I sucked at them! Games like this made me love pixels and SID/chip music."

AMOUNT PAID: €10

The 40th anniversary of Commodore's most famous computer is this year – so what better way to begin the celebrations than by highlighting one of its most fervent collectors? Dustin Vogel's collection, with over 40 different Commodore systems, 200 books and a massive variety of accessories, games and more, leaves you with little doubt about his passion for the American computer manufacturer. And it began with the VIC-20. "I was 11 years old when I got my dad's VIC-20 with a Datasette," he begins. "I had a few games on tape and some listings in books which I used to learn about programming in BASIC." With his love of code and coding established, Dustin eventually moved on to the Commodore 64. "But the VIC-20 was where it all began," he says with a grin.

Dustin began collecting back in 2010. "I decided I wanted to have a Commodore 64 again," he explains, "and also to start programming again. So after the first Commodore 64, I bought a second. And a third. Then I searched for a VIC-20, C16, Amiga and so on." As you can see from the pictures, Dustin has been busy since then, mainly collecting hardware. However, he's also an eager supporter of Commodore-related crowdfunding campaigns such as *VIC-20: A Visual History* by Giacomo Vernoni and *The Story Of The Commodore Amiga In Pixels* from Fusion Retro Books.

Interestingly, Dustin's collection features not just Commodore hardware but anything with a Commodore logo. The result is ephemera such as his most-prized possessions, a Commodore-embossed doorknob and a display light box, both in excellent condition. "Lots of times when I have been to people's houses to pick up one purchased item, I go home with a car full!" he says. "I am always grateful to anyone who sells me a special Commodore item." While his collection already impresses, Dustin's planned house move will give him more space to show off even more fantastic Commodore items.

With it being the 40th anniversary of the Commodore 64, **Retro Gamer** asks Dustin why he thinks the computer remains so popular today. "I think there are several reasons," he ponders. "Firstly, it's a very capable computer for those who like 8-bit; secondly, it is kept alive by the various crowdfunding for books, movies and hardware. And finally, nostalgia. Everyone remembers the beautiful SID music and pixel graphics. Of course, you can use an emulator, but many people prefer the real hardware." And many fans, like Dustin, also have a genuine admiration for the technology inside the C64. "The designers of the VIC-II chip, CPU and SID should be very proud," he says. "Without these chips, the Commodore 64 would not have existed. Instead, with programmers today pushing it to the max and beyond, it's as good now as it was 40 years ago. So you ask me, what makes the C64 so special? I'll tell you: pure magic!" *

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

COMMODORE LIGHT BOX

"This was probably used in shops or at trade shows."

AMOUNT PAID: €100

COMMODORE VIC-20

"My first computer ever, and the most life-changing computer of my life."

AMOUNT PAID: €120

COMMODORE 64

"It's the computer where I really learned what programming is about. My first computer with massive memory, advanced graphics and extended sound capabilities."

AMOUNT PAID: €50

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

COMMODORE BRANDED DOORKNOB

■ "It's from the Commodore HQ Building in the Netherlands. It's the only one I've ever seen, so it's very rare in my opinion and a nice item to own."

PAID: €100

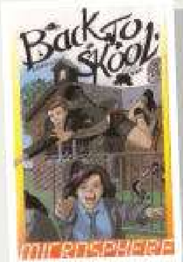
BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

The popularity of the original *Sonic* game means the value has stayed low over the last few years, and it's still relatively easy to obtain a boxed Mega Drive copy for under a tenner. Need *Sonic 3* or *Sonic & Knuckles* for your collection? That's going to set you back a lot more gold rings, and a mint boxed Game Gear *Sonic* will set you back the same, **£40-£50.**



BACK TO SKOOL

While far from rare, the sequel to *Skool Daze* is a mid-range Spectrum game, often selling for between **£8** and **£14.** The budget re-release can be snared cheaper if you jump in quick. 200 lines, reader! You are not a kangaroo!

GLOVER

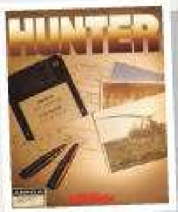
While the PlayStation version of this glove-ly game can be acquired for just a handful of coins, getting hold of *Glover* on the Nintendo 64, especially boxed, is more challenging, a PAL copy is likely to set you back **£30-£40** in nice condition.

ADVANCE WARS: DARK CONFLICT

Mint boxed copies of this excellent strategy title can be scored for **£10-£15** with loose carts usually selling for under a tenner. The US version is called *Days Of Ruin* and can reach **£27.**

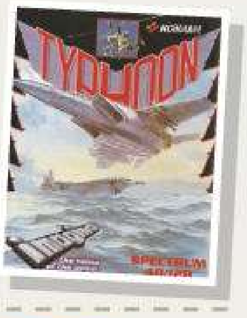
DRIVER

While all of the *Driver* games can be picked up cheaply, sealed PlayStation copies are inevitably where the big numbers come. Expect to pay almost **£250-£300** each for a sealed copy of *Driver* or *Driver 2.*



HUNTER

This technically impressive 3D game from Activision is from the big box era, so if you want to track a mint copy down, you're probably looking at **£25-£30.**



TYPHOON

The Imagine Spectrum conversion of this arcade shoot-'em-up regularly sells on eBay for **£5** to **£10,** depending on condition. The Commodore 64 game is rarer, but both can be picked up super cheap on Ocean's *Battle Stations* compilation, together with *Operation Wolf* and *Guerilla War.*

COOKIE

Retail games on the Sinclair ZX Interface 2 ROM cartridge never took off, so it's no surprise to see their prices rising. A recent auction for this Ultimate classic cooked up an impressive **£253.66** despite the seller, British Heart Foundation, looking like it didn't quite realise the value of what it was selling. Still, it's all for a good cause.

Prices correct at time of print

CAN I GET A WII-WIND?

Darran returns to Nintendo's innovative console

Back in issue 226 I spoke of my love for Nintendo's Wii. I believe it's a truly terrific console that favoured innovation over technical ability, and while its 'waggle controls' didn't always work as intended, it helped the system stand apart from its high-definition peers.

I was looking through some old issues the other day for research which led to me reading my earlier feature, which in turn led me down the rabbit hole of watching online videos with names such as 'Wii Hidden Gems' and 'Top 25 Wii Games'. Those videos then led to eBay and CeX's website, which has inevitably led to me talking about Nintendo's console again.

Because I was quite invested in the Wii when it first came out, I've already got an impressive selection of games for it (just under 70) and many of them are big hitters. Titles like *Super Mario Galaxy 1* and *2*, *Metroid: Other M*, *Dead Space: Extraction* and *Muramasa: The Demon Blade* all sit proudly on my shelves, but they were clearly in need of company so I of course looked at ways of grabbing those games I'd never got around to buying during the system's heyday.

Fortunately, Wii games, for the most part, aren't generally that expensive and it's surprising how many of the biggest games (*Mario Kart Wii*, *Super Smash Bros Brawl* and *Donkey Kong Country Returns*) can be picked up for under £20. That's not to say that expensive games don't exist on the system (I regret trading in my copy of *Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins Of The Moon* now it's going to cost me £60+ to replace it) but generally lots of genuinely great games can be purchased for under a tenner, sometimes even a fiver.

I soon took some trades to CeX and came home with a selection of new games that ranged from *Super Paper Mario* (£10) and *SSX Blur* (£2) to *Another Code R: A Journey Into Lost Memories* (£10) and *Speed Racer* (£2) which is an adaptation of the Wachowskis' 2008 movie. Normally I'd never give a game like this the time of day, largely because I'm a snob, but it had kept cropping up on numerous videos and it looked like genuine fun. As it turns out it is genuine fun and while its campaign mode is a little on the lean side and you're restricted to motion controls only, I couldn't complain for just £2.

Discovering *Speed Racer* made me wonder what other games I was missing out on. A quick discussion on Twitter led to me investigating a number of other licensed games that included *The Penguins Of Madagascar*, *Toy Story 3* and *Ratatouille*, as well as an adaptation of *Battleship*, that terrible sci-fi film that starred Rihanna. *The Penguins Of Madagascar* looks particularly interesting as you switch control between four penguins with unique abilities in order to complete each stage. The other surprise for me is *Battleship*. While the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions are generic first-person shooters by Double Helix Games, the Wii game is a turn-based strategy affair along the lines of *Advance Wars* and it's rather ace. I guess my point here is that some games aren't just for kids.

Buying new Wii games has led to me exploring more of my existing library and I've had a lot of fun in the last few weeks playing games like *Kororinpa*, an excellent physics-based game where you roll a marble around levels and Team Ninja's *Metroid: Other M*, which is the most painfully linear *Metroid* game I've ever completed, but does have some cracking action in it. Other highlights have included completing *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*, rediscovering the dark delights of *Pandora's Tower* and grabbing another copy of *Deadly Creatures* as I'm planning a Making Of feature about it. I've also grabbed a few games that have started to rise in price like *Castlevania Judgment* and *Beat The Beat: Rhythm Paradise* as I don't fancy paying higher prices in the future. I'm also keeping an eye on a few import titles like *Trauma Team*, *Excitebots* and Yuji Naka's *Fishing Resort*, but they're annoyingly pricey to import at the moment.

For now, I'm more than happy to go through my extensive back catalogue and look through my new purchases. Now I'm done with *Shattered Memories*, I'm aiming to finally complete *Fatal Frame 4*, finish the last few levels of *Elebits*, complete *Excite Truck*'s final cup and see if *Heatseeker* is the *After Burner* clone I so want it to be. I'll keep my fingers crossed. ✱

> "I regret trading in my copy of Fragile Dreams now it's going to cost me £60+ to replace it"
> **DARRAN JONES**

I WII-LY NEED THESE...

THE WII GAMES I'M STILL AFTER

FRAGILE DREAMS: FAREWELL RUINS OF THE MOON

I foolishly got rid of this because I'd convinced myself it was a typical JRPG. It isn't and now I'm upset due to its current high price.

FISHING RESORT

I'm a sucker for fishing games, especially ones with virtual aquariums that show off your catches.

EXCITEBOTS

I've been after this trick-based racer for ages but it rarely shows up on UK eBay.

TRAUMA TEAM

This medical-themed series works well on Wii, but for some reason it was never released in the UK.

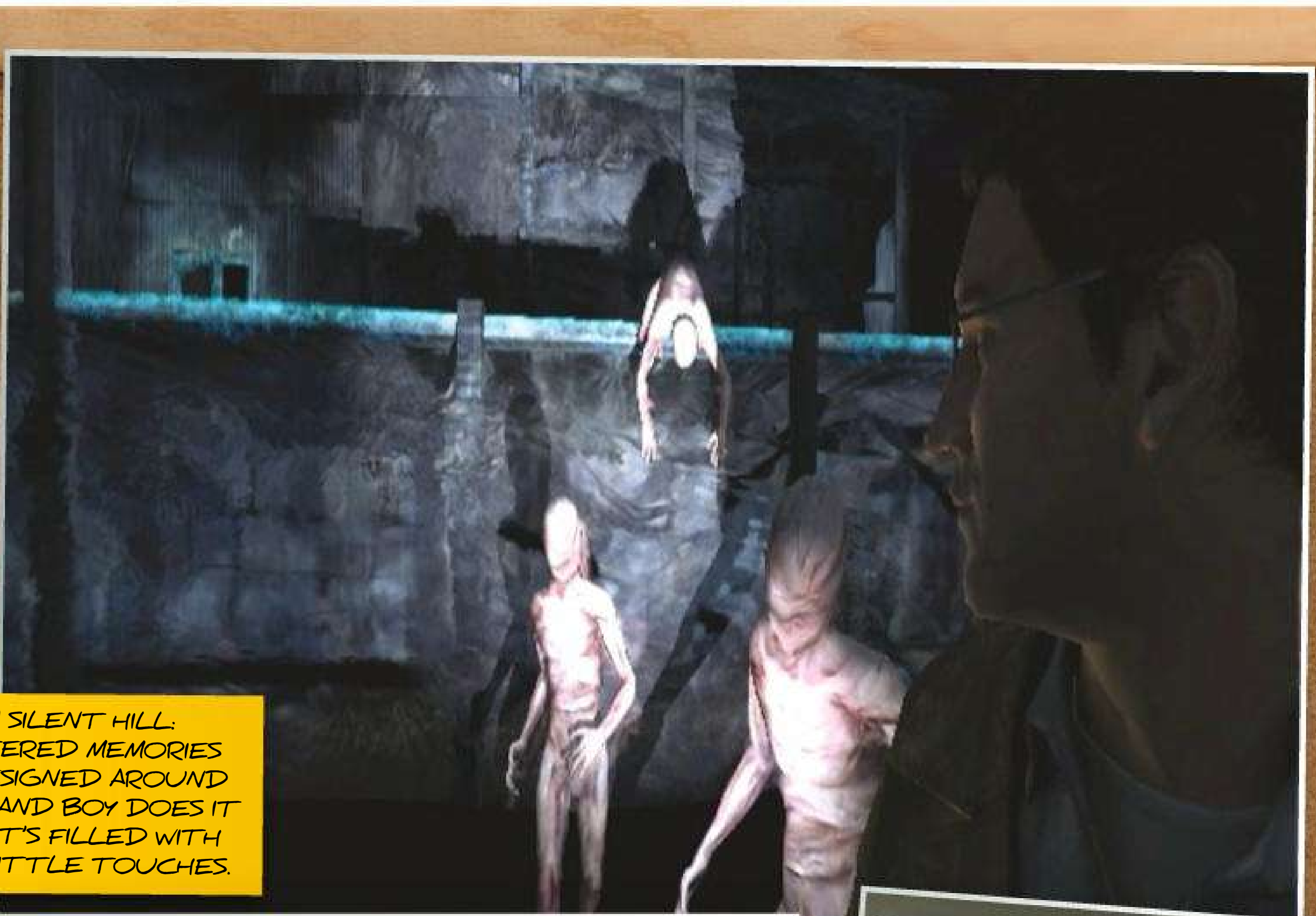
DINO STRIKE

It's a lightgun game that features dinosaurs, of course I want it in my collection.

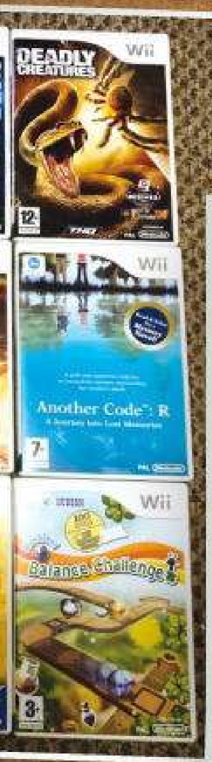
[WII] THE FILM IS ABSOLUTE BOBBINS, BUT BATTLESHIP IS A SURPRISINGLY GOOD STRATEGY GAME.

MY MOST RECENT GAMES. THESE WERE ALL FUNDED THROUGH TRADES AND UNWANTED GAMES I SOLD.

[WII] IT'S NOT AS EXPLORATIVE AS PREVIOUS GAMES, BUT I STILL ENJOYED MY PLAYTHROUGH OF METROID: OTHER M.



[WII] SILENT HILL: SHATTERED MEMORIES WAS DESIGNED AROUND THE WII AND BOY DOES IT SHOW. IT'S FILLED WITH NEAT LITTLE TOUCHES.



[WII] FRAGILE DREAMS SOUNDS RIGHT UP MY STREET. I'VE NO IDEA WHY I SOLD IT.

Wii
RATATOUILLE
TOY STORY 3
SPEED RACER
BATTLESHIP

DON'T DISMISS GAMES AIMED AT KIDS. YOU COULD BE MISSING SOME REAL GEMS.

[WII] THE WII HAS A NUMBER OF LIGHTGUN GAMES, INCLUDING DINO STRIKE. I'D LOVE TO OWN IT AT SOME POINT.

THE WII'S HIDDEN GEMS

What games do readers recommend?

Michael White
Zack & Wiki needs more love, all the love.

Devon Foster
Sin & Punishment: Star Successor. I love that game and no one talks about it.

Metal Jesus Rocks
Lost In Shadow and *Excitebots* for me.

Jason
Zack & Wiki. It's a true classic not nearly enough people played. Deserves either a sequel or just a re-release at some point.

TheDeviot
Tournament Of Legends. By far not the best fighting game by any means, but it actually tries to do something unique and the roster has some cool characters.

Cheeky Devlin
Disaster: Day Of Crisis. Dumb as a bag of rocks, but good fun.

Llama King
Carnival Games. The best multiplayer after *Wii Sports.* Played more multiplayer back in the day than any other game.

Ian Hamilton
Endless Ocean. Such a relaxing game. I loved it.

David Burgerman
Spider-Man: Friend Or Foe is such a fun 3D brawler. Even more fun with a friend, player two gets to play as any of the villains in the game.

Chris D
Not sure if it's underrated but I never see anyone mention *Tatsunoko Vs Capcom* – I really loved that game!

Stian_Abes
Harvest Moon: Tree Of Tranquility. Last good game in the series history imo.

Jon Burtoft
A couple of favourites are *Kororinpa* and *Ivy The Kiwi.*

Cubism
Excite Truck is one of the best arcade racers I've played. Insane jumps and crashes but forgiving and not frustrating to play, with good use of motion controls.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

OLD!
THE NES BOOK

STAR LETTER

A TIME FOR PEACE

Hey **Retro Gamer**,

I just wanted to say how much Nick's *Tetris* Retro Revival piece resonated with me. I believe gaming is massively underrated in just how therapeutic it can be. As well as videogames I am a massive tabletop gamer and while getting together to play board games suffered under lockdown, I was fortunate enough thanks to things like Googlemeet to be able to carry on running my weekly pen-and-paper role-playing group all through lockdown. Building worlds of my own fulfils much the same role as it sounds like *Tetris* does for Nick.

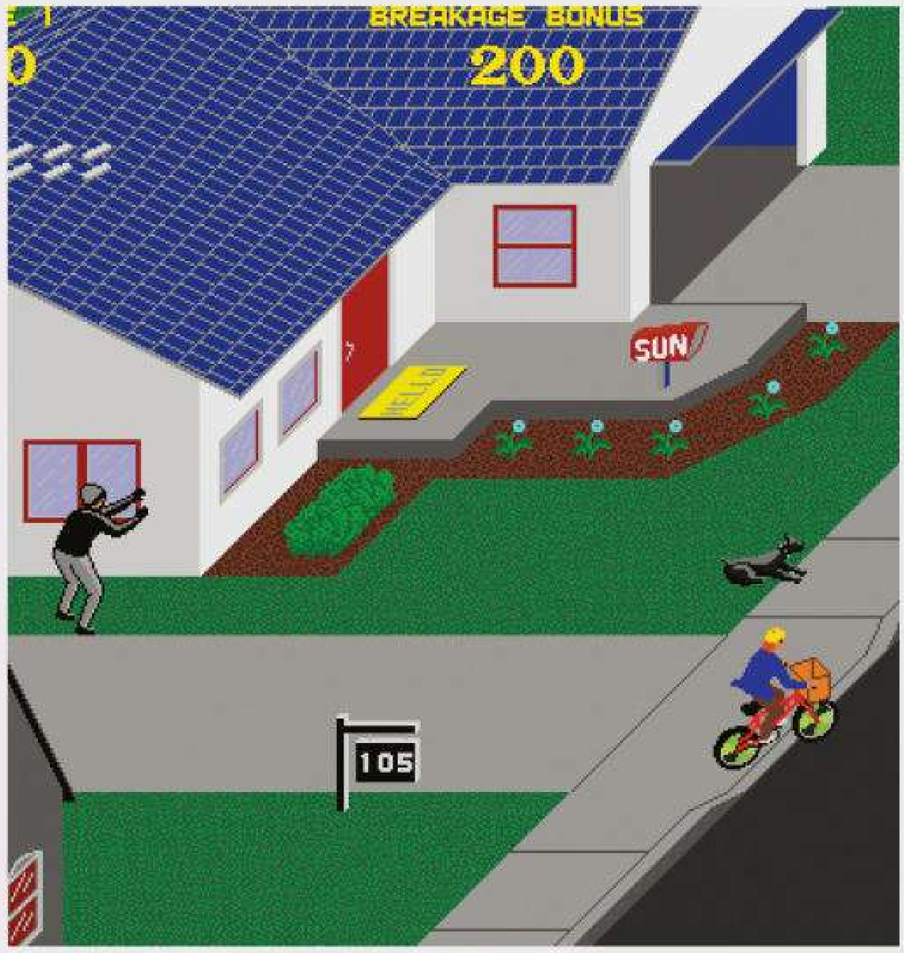
And my youngest daughter (nine) who sadly is nowhere near as confident in herself as she should be at times, finds *Minecraft* very soothing when she gets a bit stressed or anxious. She also loves *Paperboy* and *Smash TV*. Games, whether tabletop or on a screen have tremendous positive powers to bring people together and impact on our mental wellbeing beyond just being games in this respect.

Thank you to everyone who works on the mag, and Nick for sharing.

All the best, and keep safe,

Aidan Degg

We're glad you enjoyed the article, Aidan. And you're right, we find that gaming is a great way to relieve stress, unless of course you're playing *Elden Ring*. Thanks for writing in and we'll get a book out to you.



» [Arcade] Aidan's nine-year-old daughter already has great taste in videogames.

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5 Link

» [Saturn] If we do feature *NiGHTS* again, it will probably be as an Ultimate Guide.

STILL DREAMING

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I've been reading your magazine since issue 1 and think in that time it has been consistently the best game magazine out there. One area I would love to see a bit more coverage of is the poor old Sega Saturn and specifically its criminally underrated classic *NiGHTS Into Dreams*. Any chance? Also, if I am being greedy, how about a feature on classic cassette demos for the C64?

Keep up the great work,

Robbie Patterson

We ran a Making Of *NiGHTS Into Dreams* all the way back in issue 45 Robbie, so it's unlikely we'd cover it in the same detail. The cassette demos idea is good, so leave that with us.

FEELING STUMPED

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

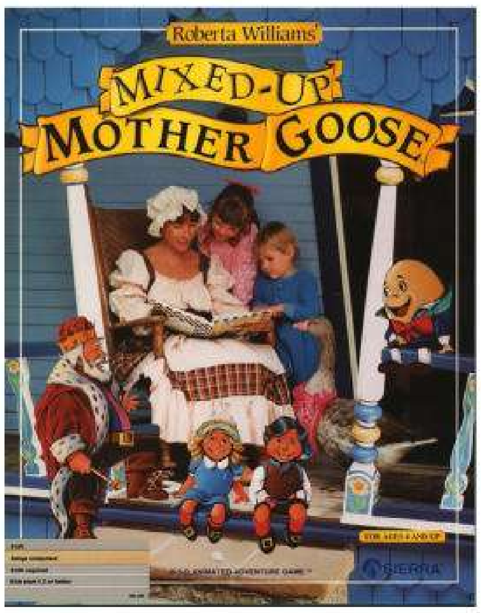
I've been a subscriber for nearly two years now and love it. I'm gutted I didn't come across you guys earlier.

Anyway, for years now I have been trying to track down a game that I had on the Amiga 500+. It was basically, from what I remember, a nursery rhyme game in the style of say *Monkey Island* or *Simon The Sorcerer* but not as good-looking. From what I've seen online, it isn't *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* as I just can't remember it looking like that. I do remember having to get Jack and Jill up the hill and the game also mentions Little Jack Horner and The Owl And The Pussycat, but I've not seen these when looking at info on *Mixed-Up Mother Goose*. Please can you find out more on this for me.

Many thanks,

Rob

We're sorry Rob, but you've absolutely stumped us. We'd have suggested *Mixed-*



» Rob is convinced *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* isn't the game he's looking for, but it ticks many boxes.

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Up Mother Goose as well. Hopefully a reader will be able to help out.

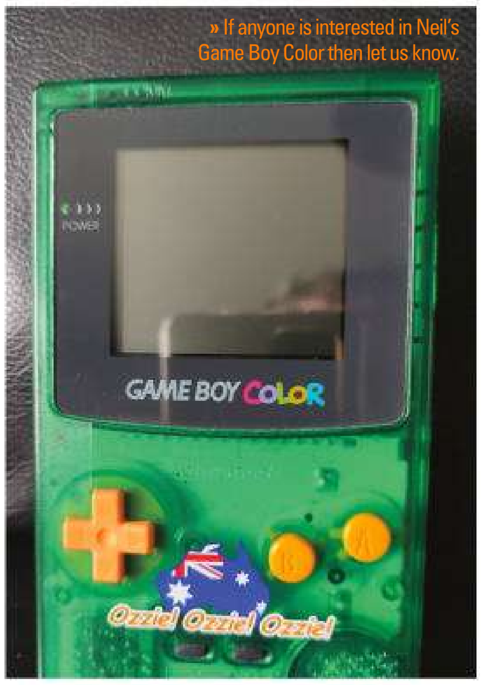
COLLECTOR NEEDED

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I am hoping to find a Nintendo collector in the UK as I have a rare Game Boy Color that I want to sell. It is an Australian Gold & Green Neotones made for the 2000 Olympics and is complete with box and pamphlets. I know you feature articles on collectors in your publication. If at all possible could you give me contact details or pass mine on. Many thanks,

Neil

That's a lovely piece of kit, Neil. We can't share the details of past collectors but any that are reading the mag will now see your handheld and can get in touch with us.



» If anyone is interested in Neil's Game Boy Color then let us know.

ADS WANTED

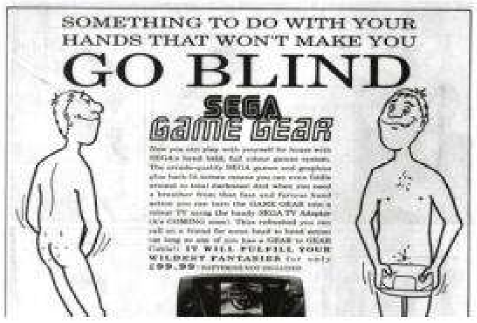
Dear **Retro Gamer**,

You should definitely consider exploring Nineties print ads as a featured article. Older gaming magazines, such as *GamePro*, had some full-page ads that were notoriously outrageous. Some ranged from the bizarre (Game Boy Pocket's 'Seriously Distracting' ad) to the just plain inappropriate (Game Gear's 'Go Blind' ad). Some of these decisions were strange choices when you consider that the target demographic was presumably pre-teens.

Best,

Andreas Charalambous

That's a good idea, Andreas. There were lots of inappropriate adverts during this period, so it would be interesting to learn about the justification behind them. We'll see what we can do.


SOMETHING TO DO WITH YOUR HANDS THAT WON'T MAKE YOU
GO BLIND
SEGA
GAME GEAR
IT WILL FULFILL YOUR WILDEST FANTASIES for only
£99.99

» *Viz* had a number of questionable game ads. See the rest at bit.ly/ukresviz

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

David Ward

The passing of Ocean Software's David Ward has had us discussing the rich legacy of games Ocean produced. Darran has fond memories of *Chase HQ*, Nick loves *Midnight Resistance*, while Andy enjoyed playing *Operation Wolf*. Tim mentioned *Cobra*, which he used to play on the C64.

SCORE
001400
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ENEMIES
53 05 06
HOSTAGES
X 0
DAMAGE
RESCUE THE HOSTAGES !

» [ZX Spectrum] *Operation Wolf* was great fun on the Spectrum.

Your say

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Sonic The Hedgehog game?

SONIC
THE HEDGEHOG
©SEGA 1991

Hey Moustache!
Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games – two gaming legends brought together (and also because I'm on the credits). It's fun too!

SPACthe EMan
It used to be *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, but *Sonic Mania* is as close to perfection as we've seen in the series. Bring the sequel already.

Adam Rowley
Probably *Sonic 2* for the Mega Drive, it was my first game ever and one I used to play with my mum. Plus it has improvements over the original.

Sloanysoft
Sonic CD, because it's the correct answer.

Daniel Major
It's *Sonic Chaos* for me. Completely different and fresh. I'm surprised about how often it's overlooked.

Retro Red Plays
Sonic The Hedgehog. It's a timeless game and spans generations with my five-year-old nephew getting into videogames because of it!

Tom Parry
Sonic 2. It improves on the first game in nearly every way and is effortlessly playable. It's the perfect *Sonic* game in my opinion. [I agree - Ed]

Zoë Kirk-Robinson
Sonic 1 on Game Gear. Its slower pace, emphasis on platforming over speed, and sheer fun make it a stand-out classic. I love it!

Roy Raftery
Sonic Generations is the perfect modern *Sonic* game. Has everything you'd want from a *Sonic* game period.

lunatic skies
Sonic CD. The music, the amazing intro, and it was fun to change the levels by changing the past.

Rafael Costabeber
Sonic 1 on Genesis. Even the soundtrack almost makes me cry.

Goldtingle
Sonic 3 & Knuckles, I think it's the most 'complete' of the classic Sonic experience.

Lee
Sonic 1 for the Game Gear. I had a Game Boy, but seeing *Sonic* running on my friend's Game Gear for the first time convinced me to trade up.

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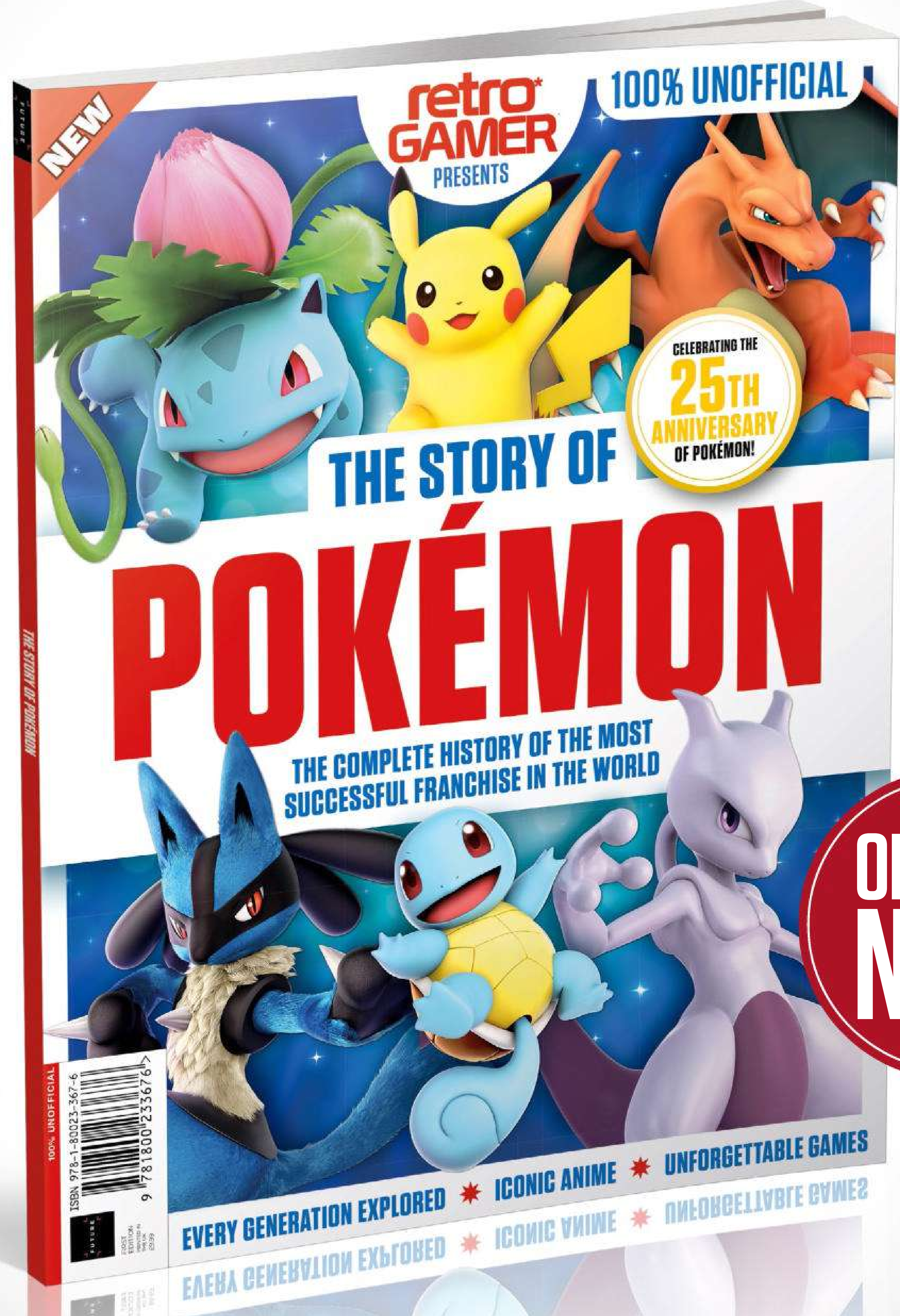
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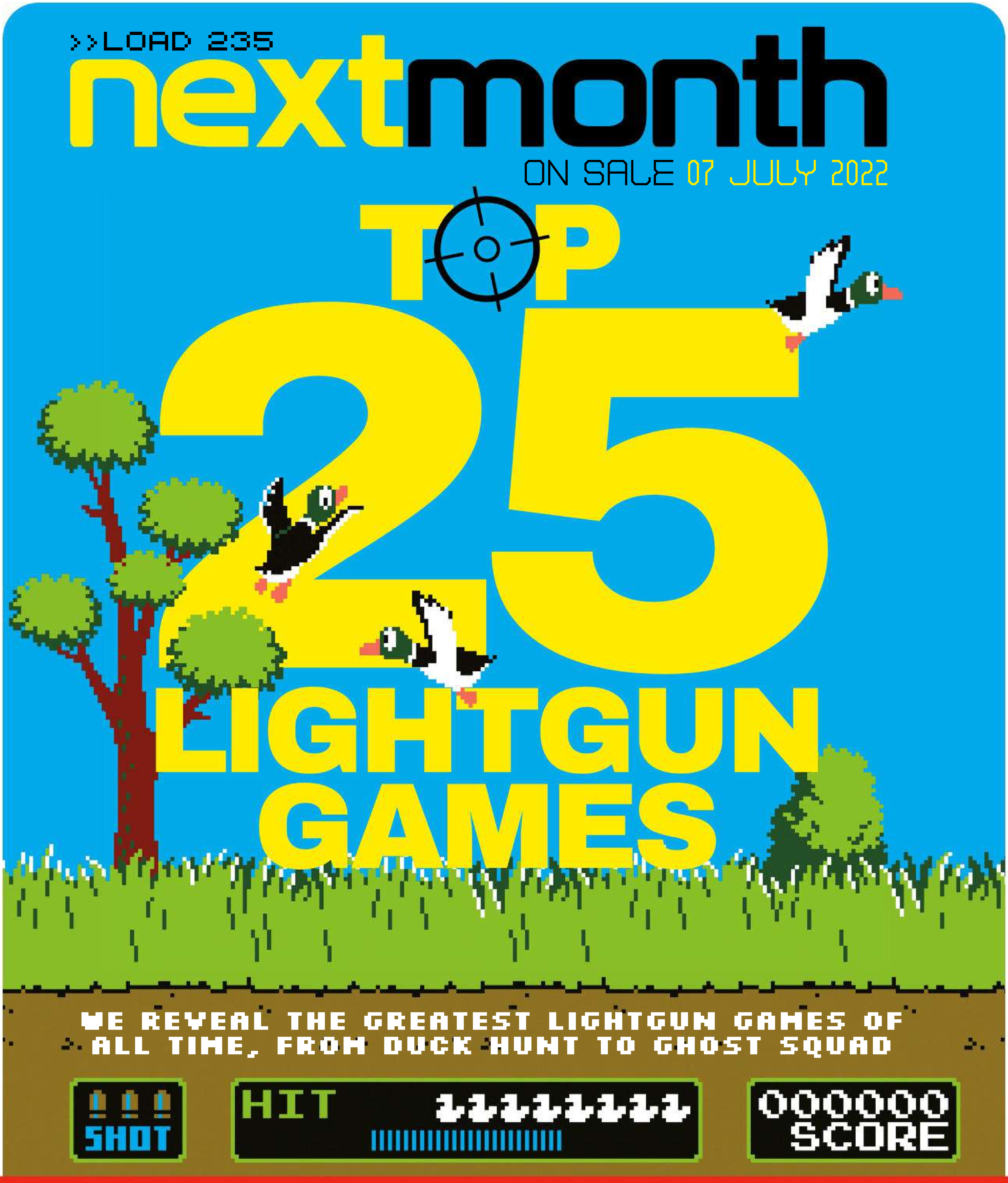
TOP 25 LIGHTGUN GAMES



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Advance Wars: Dark Conflict

WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

» DS » 2008 » INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

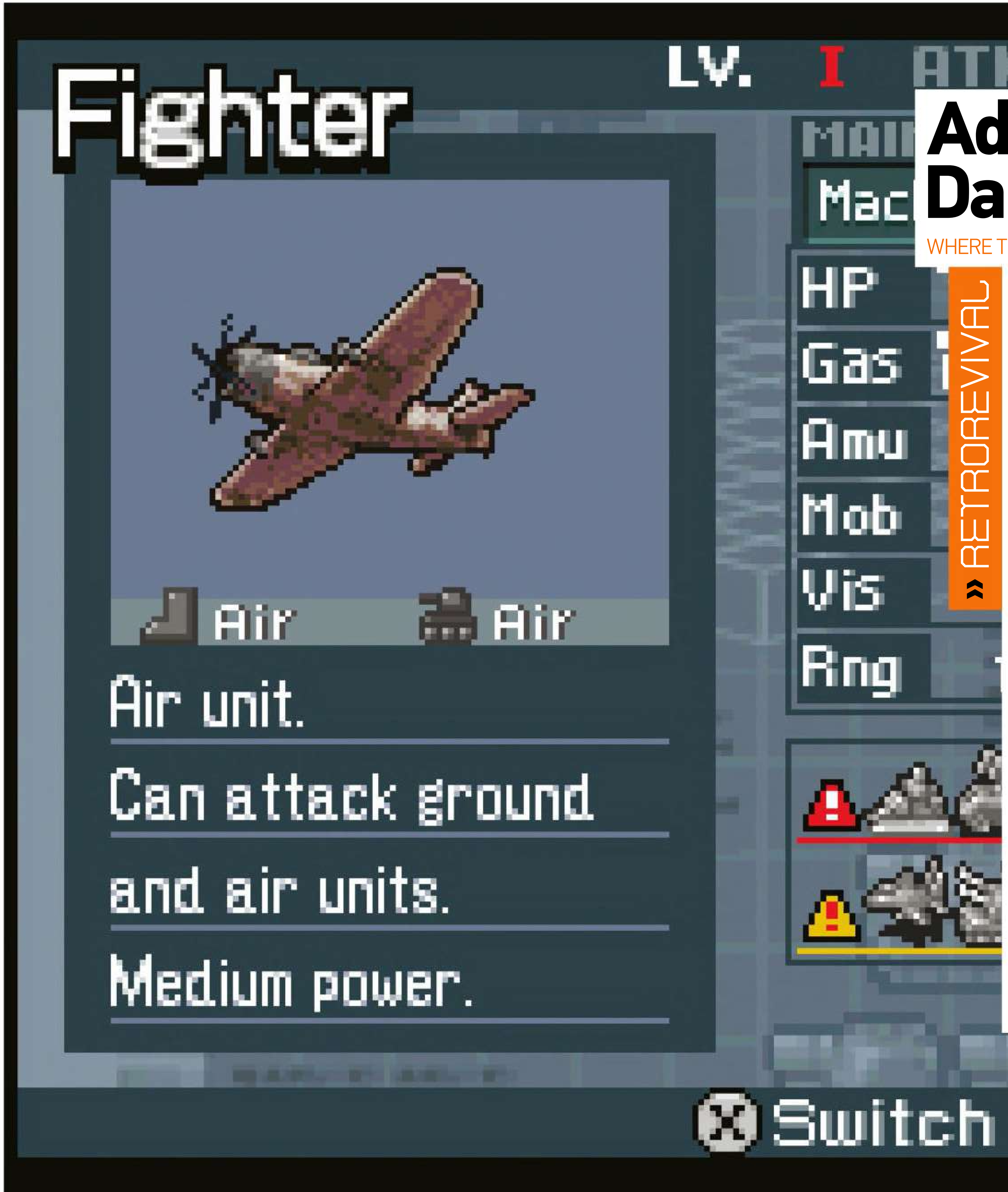
Intelligent Systems' *Wars* series started life on the Famicom but many Western gamers wouldn't have experienced it until the release of *Advance Wars* in 2001. The Game Boy Advance game was not only perfectly suited to gaming on the go, but also married surprisingly complex tactical battles with an entertaining story, colourful characters and devastating CO Powers that could decimate the opposing team.

The adventures of Andy and the rest of the Orange Star COs would continue with *Advance Wars 2: Black Hole* Rising and the first DS release *Advance Wars: Dual Strike*, so when a second game was announced for the DS, gamers automatically assumed they'd be getting more of the same – they were wrong.

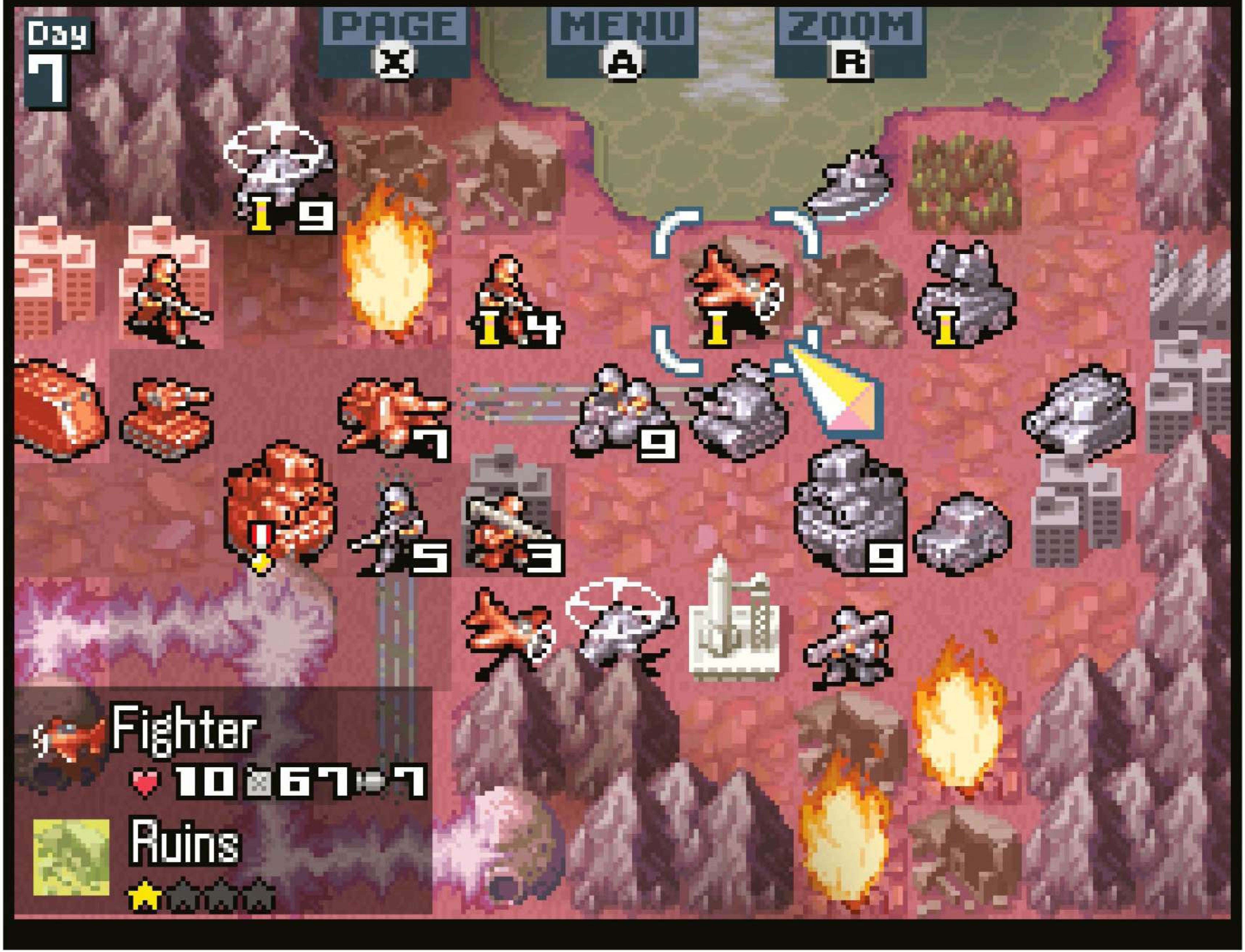
While *Advance Wars: Dark Conflict* would continue to deliver expertly crafted skirmishes and full-scale battles like its predecessors had, it also distanced itself quite heavily from the many tropes and themes that had made the series so popular. Andy and the rest of Orange Star are completely absent and the conflict is now set in a bleak post-apocalyptic world that has been ravaged by meteor strikes, leaving new protagonist Will caught in a deadly clash between two warring nations.

The hopelessness of Will's situation is mirrored by *Dark Conflict*'s muted colour scheme, which is a world away from the cheerful cartoon look of the earlier games. It's also significantly tougher, which can occasionally cause frustration but also grants a better feeling of accomplishment when you do finally clear one of the more difficult maps. While CO Powers have been greatly stripped back, numerous new mechanics like levelling up during battles, a host of new units and terrain and a surprisingly strong story will keep you gripped through the game's 26 challenging missions.

I'm still waiting for the Switch release of *Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp*, but revisiting *Dark Conflict* has been a great diversion, even if its heavier story themes means it's not always a pleasant one. ✱



Air unit.
Can attack ground
and air units.
Medium power.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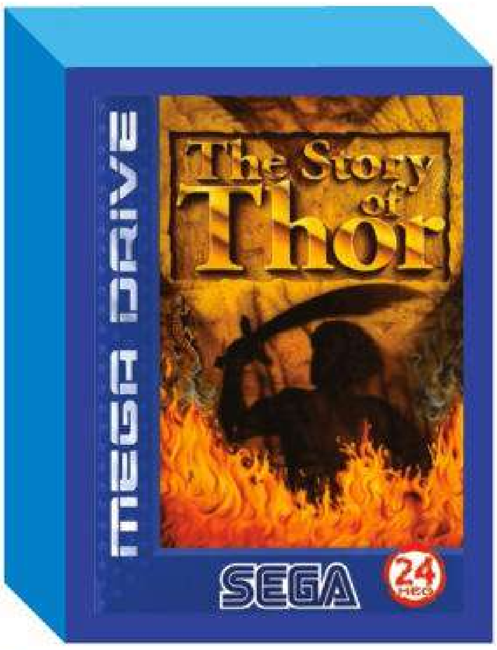
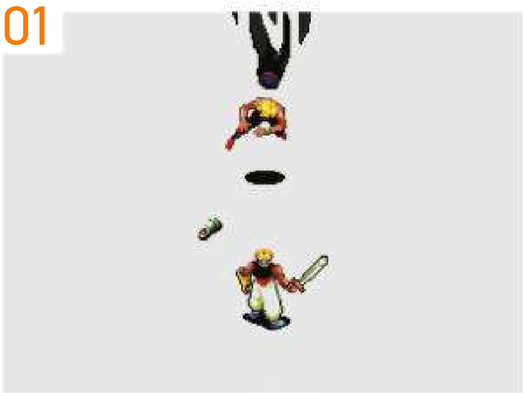


THE STORY OF THOR

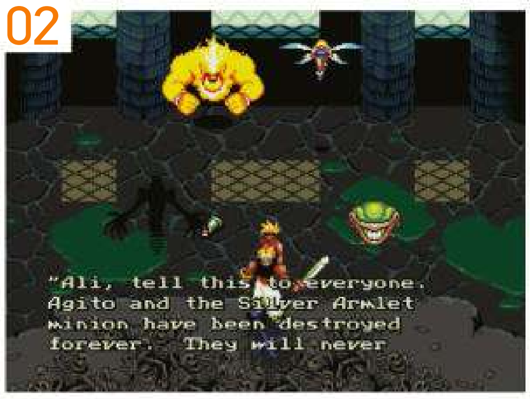
» When Prince Ali discovers a sentient golden armlet, it leads him on an epic quest. Oasis is in trouble and the armlet tells Ali he can save his kingdom if he teams up with four elemental spirits and defeats Agito, a dangerous sorcerer who wields his own armlet. Will Ali succeed? Let's find out…

01



» After an intense fight with Agito, Ali finally defeats the evil sorcerer. As Agito's power wanes a flash of bright light overwhelms Ali. Upon opening his eyes he sees the silver armlet and a strange, but familiar form in front of him.

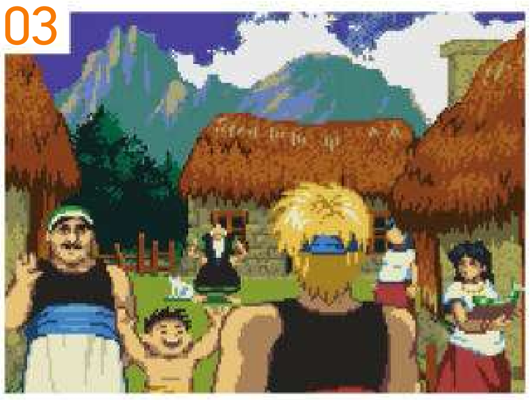
02



"Ali, tell this to everyone.
Agito and the Silver Armlet
minion have been destroyed
forever. They will never

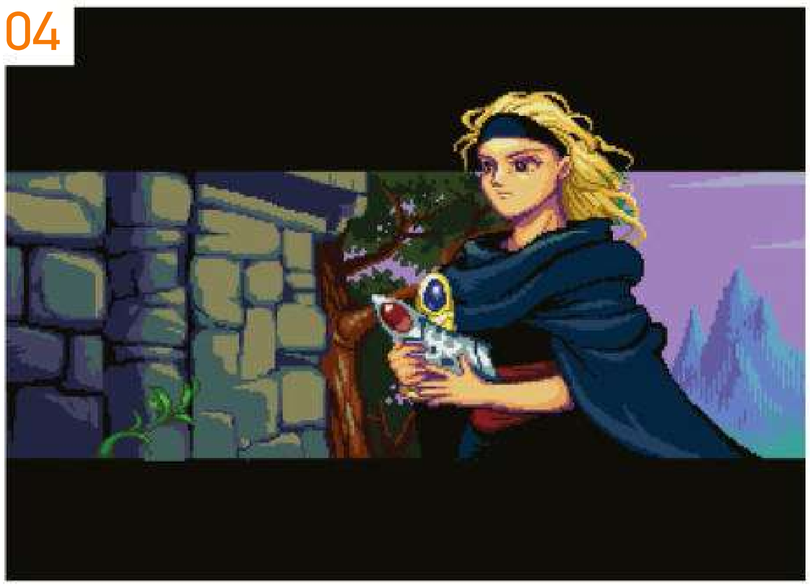
» The stranger turns out to be Gwyn, Ali's sister and she's delighted to be free of Agito's curse. Ali's joy at being reunited with his sister is tempered by the fact he must leave his four new-found elemental friends behind.

03



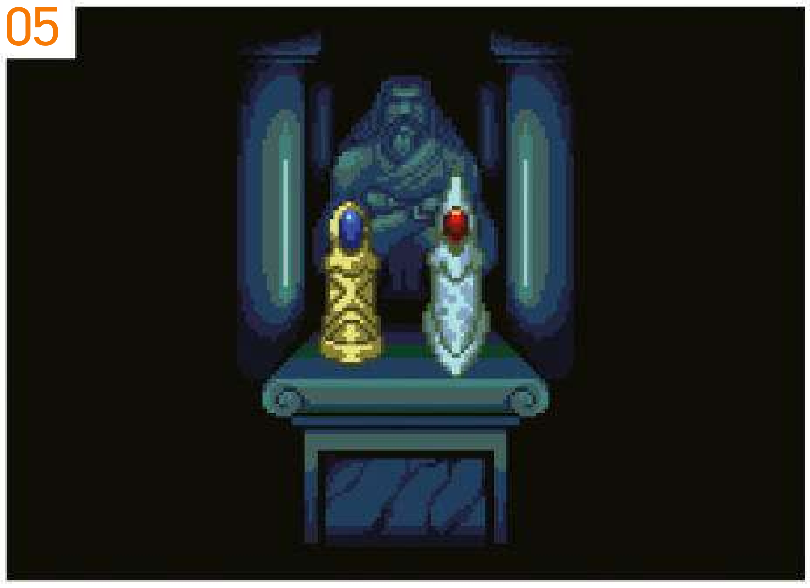
» Oasis is saved and Ali returns home. While he's sad at the loss of his new friends, the appreciation of Oasis' villagers soon makes him realise that he was right to let them go. The kingdom's safety must always come first.

04



» While Ali basks in the adoration of Oasis' villagers, Gwyn has a journey of her own and she sets off to atone for her sins by taking the sentient armlets back to their rightful home, not knowing if she'll ever see her beloved brother again.

05



» Gwyn finally completes her epic quest and the paired sentient armlets are left to their own devices. Will they stay lost forever, or is Agito's power likely to rise again? You'll have to find out in the sequel.

retro GAMER

SONIC'S

GREATEST MOMENTS

50 MEMORIES THAT DEFINED SEGA'S MASCOT

SONIC BOOM

***Sonic The Hedgehog* caused a huge commotion when it arrived on Sega's Mega Drive in 1991.** Here was a game that not only highlighted the power of Sega's 16-bit console, but introduced a character who would become every bit as recognised as Nintendo's Mario.

Sega put a tremendous amount of effort into creating its first *Sonic* game and the gamble paid off handsomely, not only catapulting the company into the higher echelons of console royalty (for a limited time at least), but also laying the groundwork for a new mascot that would become the face of the company for years to come. Nowadays Sonic is synonymous with Sega and it's impossible to think of one without thinking of the other.

That's partly because Sonic The Hedgehog is a great character and partly because he starred in a game that was absolutely stuffed full of memorable moments, whether it was watching rings spill from Sonic for the first time or seeing the incorrigible scamp wagging his finger at you on the game's opening title screen. Nick and I have shared some of our personal favourites here, both from Sonic's first adventure and his many later ones. How many do you remember?

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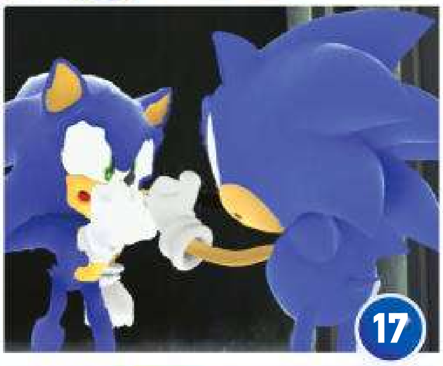
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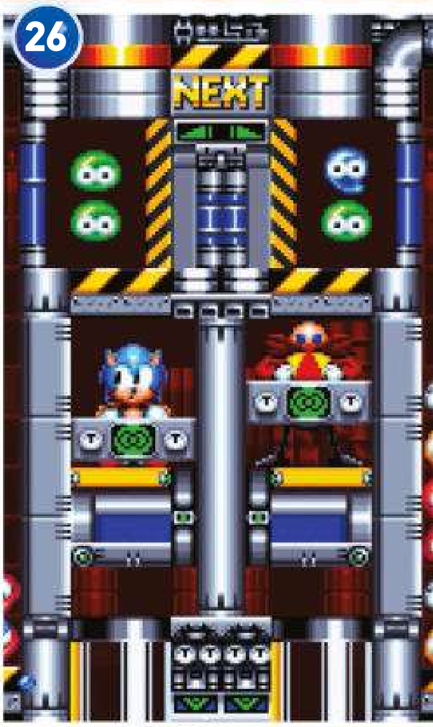
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SCORE 200
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RINGS 23

31

12
SCORE
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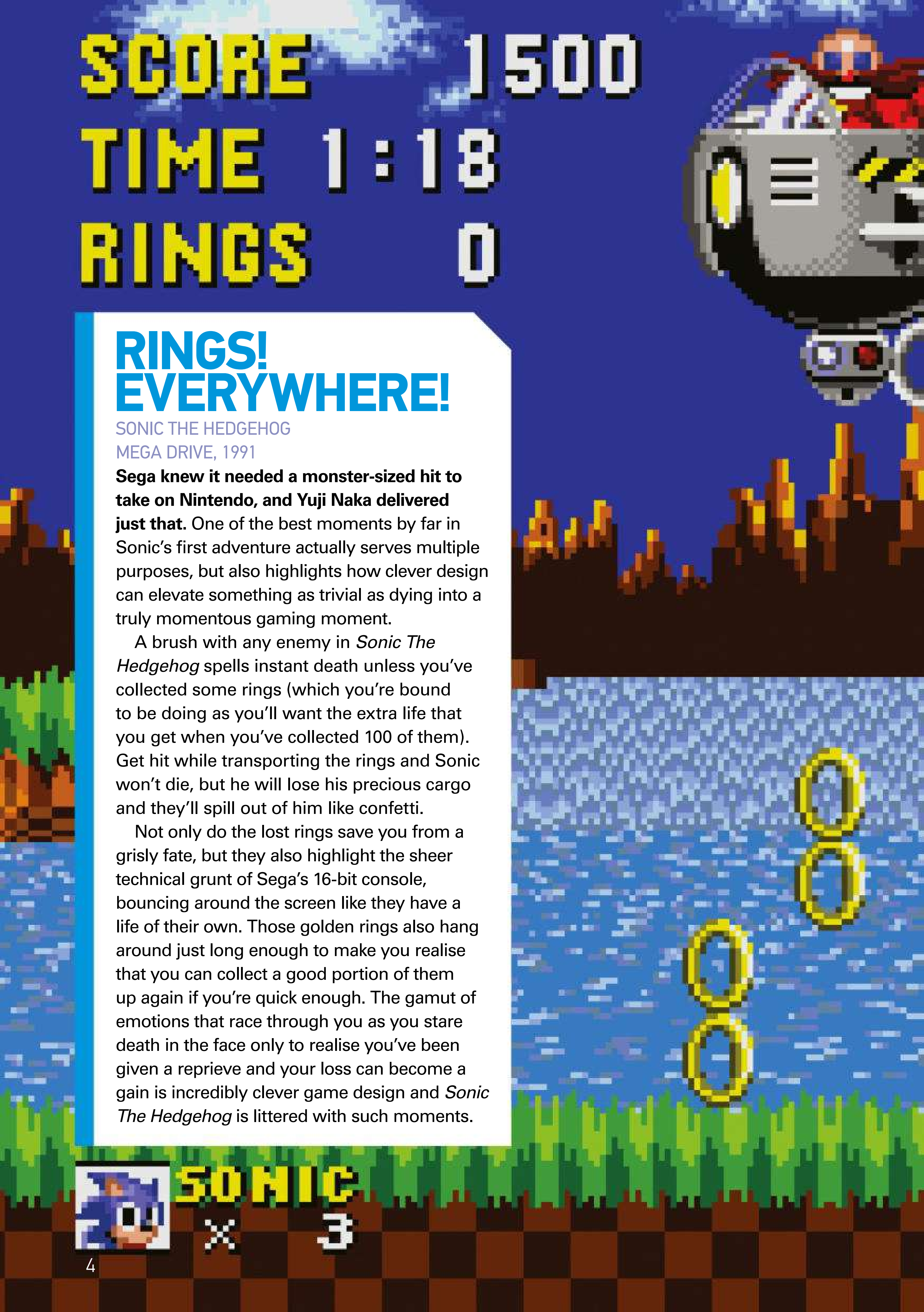
10
SONIC
THE HEDGEHOG
2
TM
1 PLAYER
2 PLAYER VS © 1992

CONTENTS

04 RINGS! EVERYWHERE!
06 MEETING SONIC
SWINGING SONIC
SONIC'S DO-OVER
07 FEEL THE LOVE
SONIC THE SAVIOUR
08 SONIC, MEET SHADOW
09 ISLAND ON FIRE
10 ONE LAST BREATH
SONIC THE TURNCOAT
A DAY TO REMEMBER
11 A WHOLE NEW WORLD
WONDERFUL WISPS
SEGA FOREVER
12 AERIAL ASSAULT
CRISIS RESOLVED
SUPER SONIC
13 BE THE BADDIE
A NEW LEVEL OF TERROR
TAILS GOES SOLO
14 LOOK OUT! KILLER WHALE!
16 CAN YOU FEEL THE SUNSHINE?
17 DOUBLE VISION
18 ZERO ESCAPE
TRUCE TIME
OLYMPIC GOLD
19 THE ONLY WAY IS UP
UFO CATCHER
TAKE THE DRAGON ROAD
20 REPLICA RACE
22 NEW DISCOVERIES
JUST HANGING OUT
FOE TURNED FRIEND?
23 TWISTED FIRESTARTER
SEEING DOUBLE
ADRENALINE RUSH
24 RIDE THE RAILS
GOING LOOPY
DREAM TEAM
25 SUPER SHOWDOWN
ANIMATED ANTICS
26 RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE
28 BASHING MARIO
29 A TRULY SPECIAL STAGE
30 HURRY UP!
TEAM TRIBUTE
TRAPPED UNDER ICE
31 LEGS 11
SPACE RACE
GET A-LIFE



RINGS! EVERYWHERE!

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
MEGA DRIVE, 1991

Sega knew it needed a monster-sized hit to take on Nintendo, and Yuji Naka delivered just that. One of the best moments by far in Sonic's first adventure actually serves multiple purposes, but also highlights how clever design can elevate something as trivial as dying into a truly momentous gaming moment.

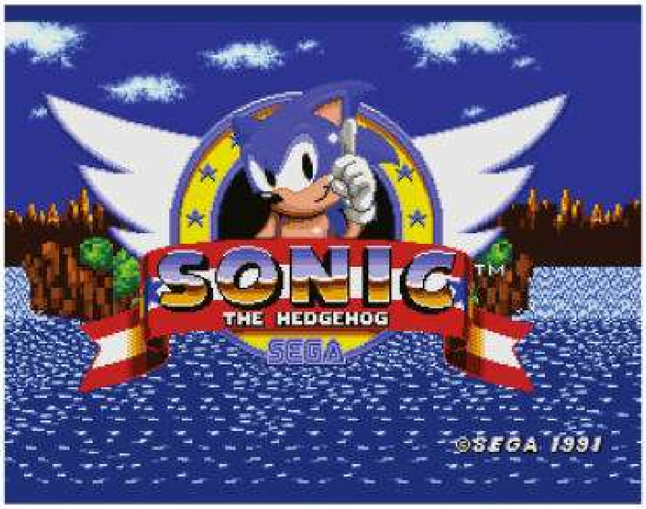
A brush with any enemy in *Sonic The Hedgehog* spells instant death unless you've collected some rings (which you're bound to be doing as you'll want the extra life that you get when you've collected 100 of them). Get hit while transporting the rings and Sonic won't die, but he will lose his precious cargo and they'll spill out of him like confetti.

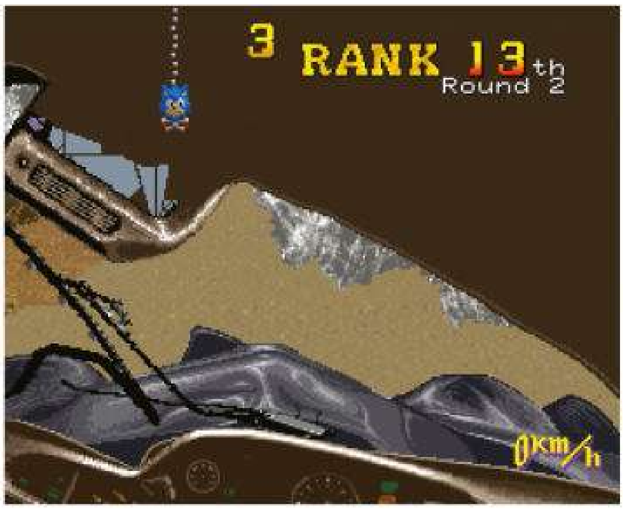
Not only do the lost rings save you from a grisly fate, but they also highlight the sheer technical grunt of Sega's 16-bit console, bouncing around the screen like they have a life of their own. Those golden rings also hang around just long enough to make you realise that you can collect a good portion of them up again if you're quick enough. The gamut of emotions that race through you as you stare death in the face only to realise you've been given a reprieve and your loss can become a gain is incredibly clever game design and *Sonic The Hedgehog* is littered with such moments.

MEETING SONIC

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, MEGA DRIVE, 1991

Few gamers will forget their first encounter with Sega's evergreen mascot. A triumphant cry of "Sega" rings out as the cartridge boots up, leading to a black 'Sonic Team Presents' screen. Sonic then pops out of his own logo and proceeds to wave his finger cheekily at you while a joyously bouncy tune plays in the background. It's a swaggering, confident intro suggesting Sega and Sonic himself mean business.





SWINGING SONIC

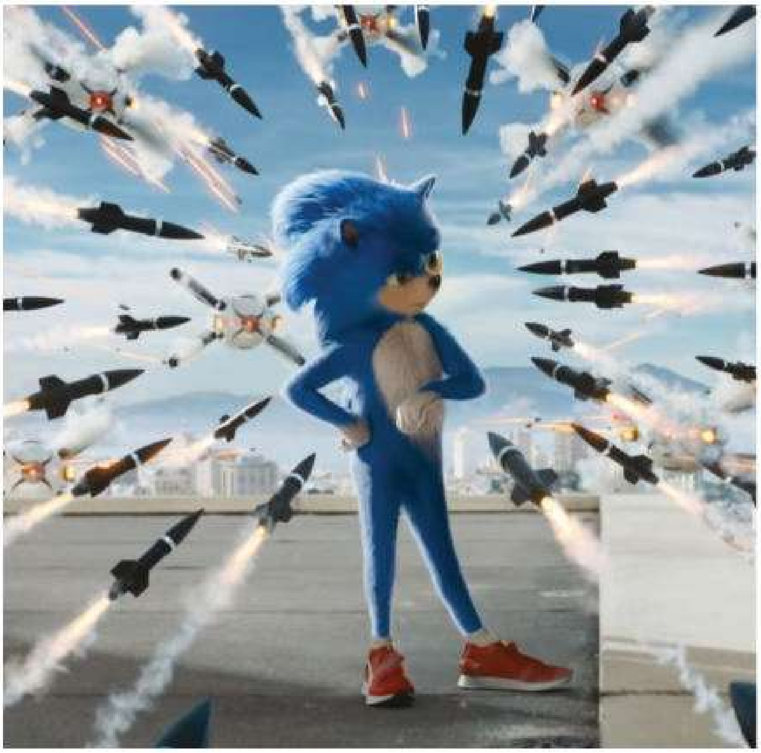
RAD MOBILE, ARCADE, 1990

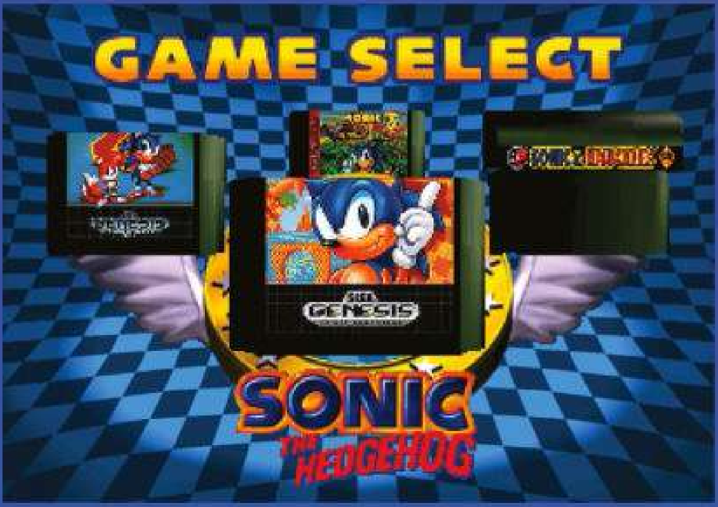
Sega AM3's arcade racer didn't exactly set arcades alight and it also failed to achieve a stellar result on Saturn. It did, however, introduce many gamers to Sonic for the first time, as the little tyke can be seen swinging as a decorative item from your rearview mirror. The Easter egg not only highlights Sega's confidence in Sonic but also acts as a lovely surprise for any Sonic fan who played the game later. Gotta go fast!

SONIC'S DO-OVER

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, CINEMA, 2020

Let's be honest, the trailer Paramount released for its new *Sonic* movie in 2019 was absolutely horrifying. The nightmarish creation had weird human teeth and terrifying eyes and looked a world away from the Sonic of the games and cartoons. Despair turned into triumph, however, when fans convinced Paramount to redesign him ahead of the movie's 2020 release. The end result was a powerful moment for Sonic fans everywhere.

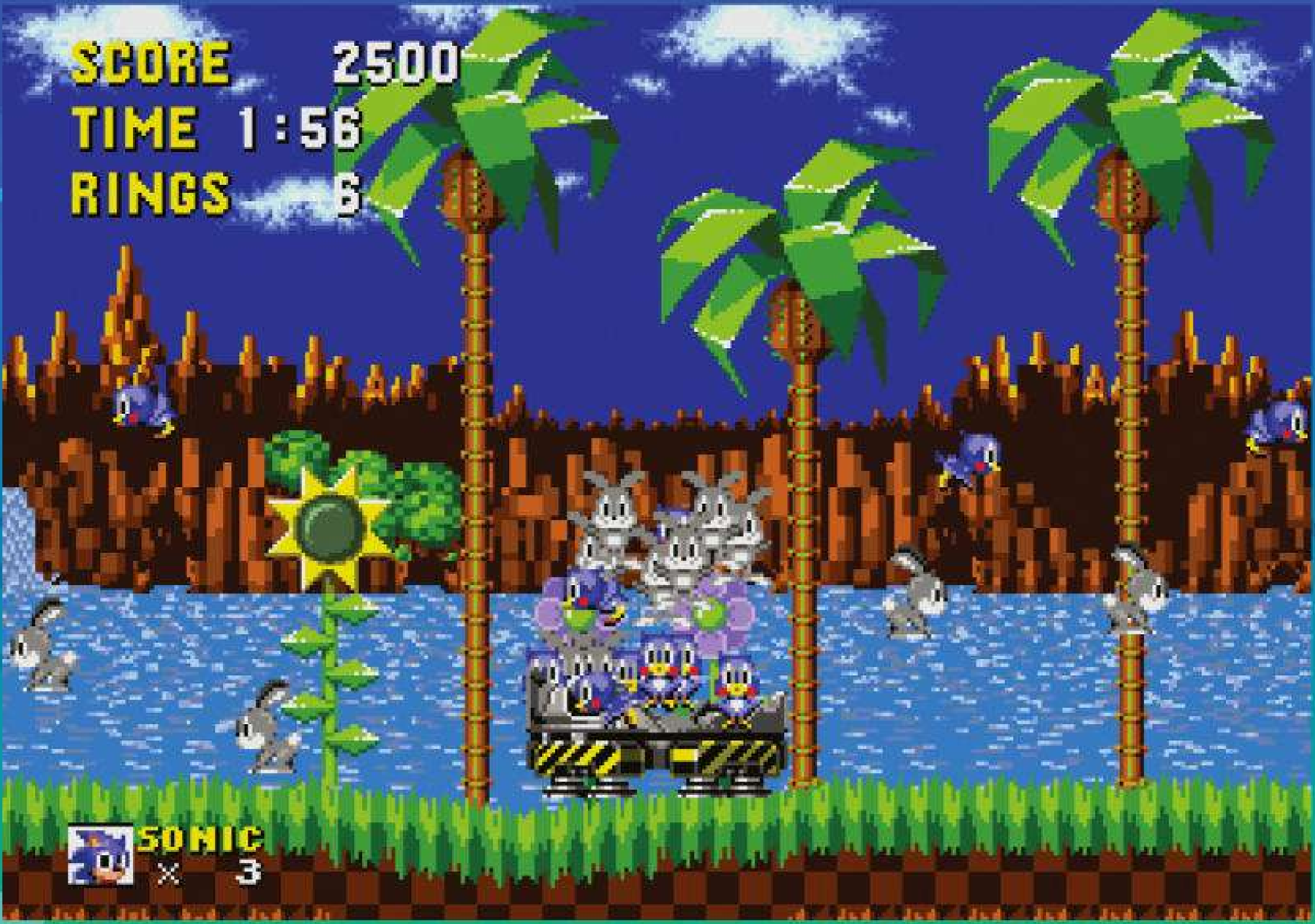




FEEL THE LOVE

SONIC JAM, SATURN, 1997

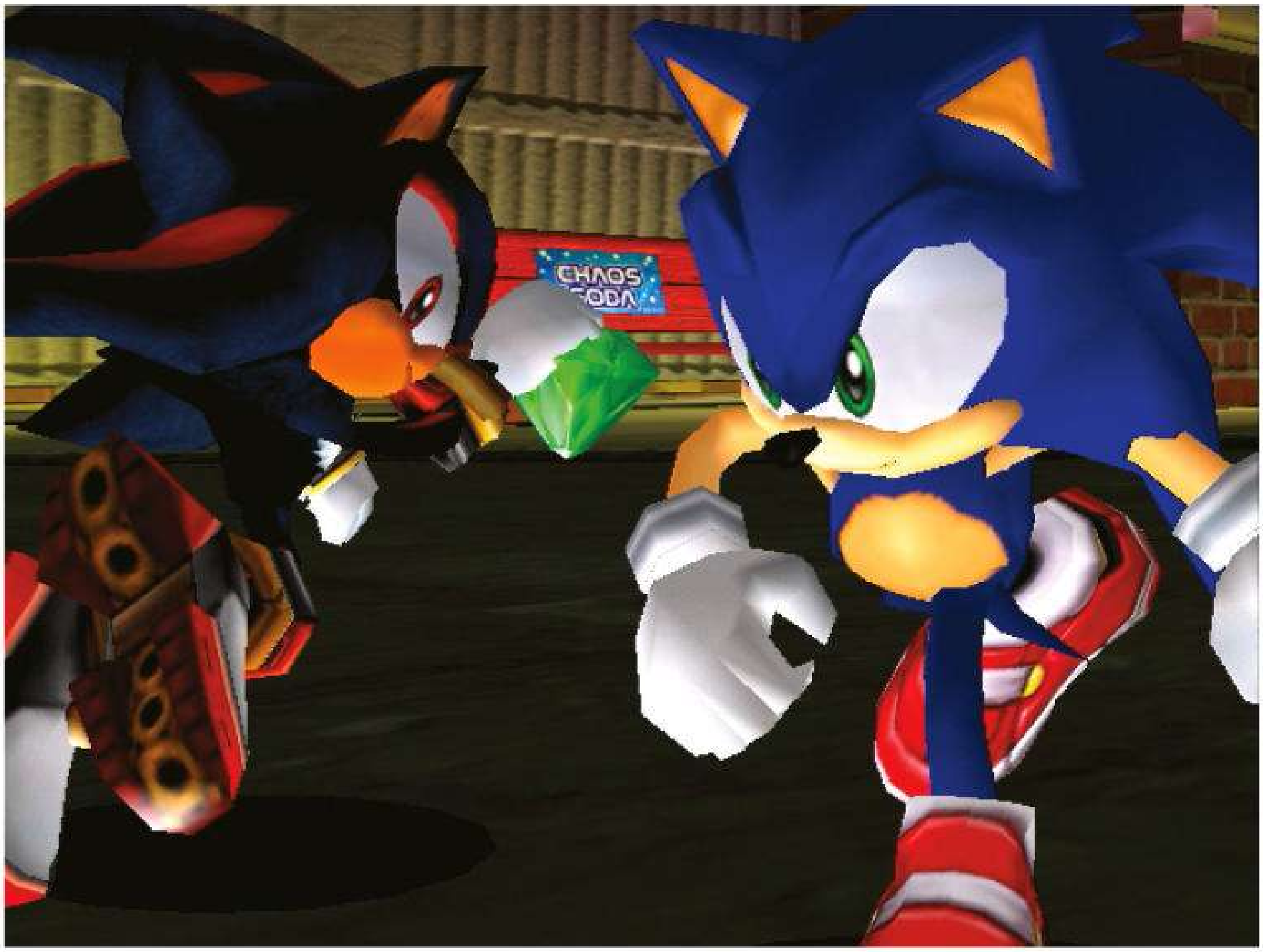
Sega's Saturn may not have received a proper *Sonic* game, but it did get this brilliant compilation. It painstakingly ports *Sonic 1-3* and *Sonic & Knuckles* and adds numerous extras, including new difficulty modes and quality-of-life enhancements like adding the Spin Dash to *Sonic 1*. Stuffed with behind-the-scenes material, it's an astonishingly comprehensive package that made fans realise Sonic Team loved the *Sonic* games as much as they did.



SONIC THE SAVIOUR

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, MEGA DRIVE, 1991

Sonic doesn't only love his friends, he also cares for the animals that share his world. So when the nefarious Robotnik imprisons them the plucky hedgehog quite rightly vows revenge. Every time you face off against the rotund Doc, you not only have the satisfaction of trouncing him and watching him flounce off in a sulk, but you also experience the joy of seeing all Sonic's freed woodland friends bounce and fly away to safety. Awwwwww.



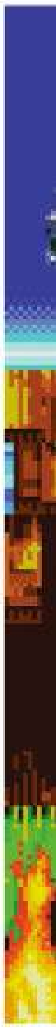
SONIC, MEET SHADOW

SONIC ADVENTURE 2, DREAMCAST, GAMECUBE, 2001

According to Eddie Adams in *Boogie Nights* "Everyone's blessed with one special thing", and in the case of Sonic he's fast – bloody fast, in fact. Sega has used Sonic's impressive speed constantly throughout his career, from employing it to get him out of sticky situations to simply using it as a way to emphasise how cool he is compared to his rivals. But what happens when Sonic loses the very thing that makes him so special?

It's something you have to wrestle with in *Sonic Adventure 2*, and it happens when you meet Shadow The Hedgehog for the very first time. The lab-created Shadow not only refers to himself as the "Ultimate Life Form" but can use the power of the Chaos Emeralds to accelerate his speed, allowing him to outspeed even Sonic, who is overcome by how fast Shadow is.

Shadow escapes and Sonic is quickly captured in his place, leaving you to first ponder how you'll get out of your current predicament and how on earth you're actually going to best Shadow when you finally catch up with him.

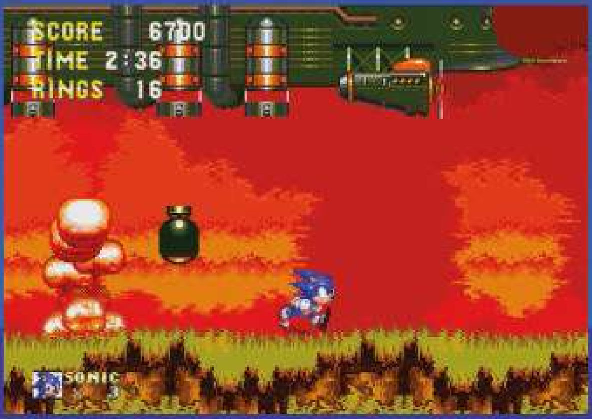


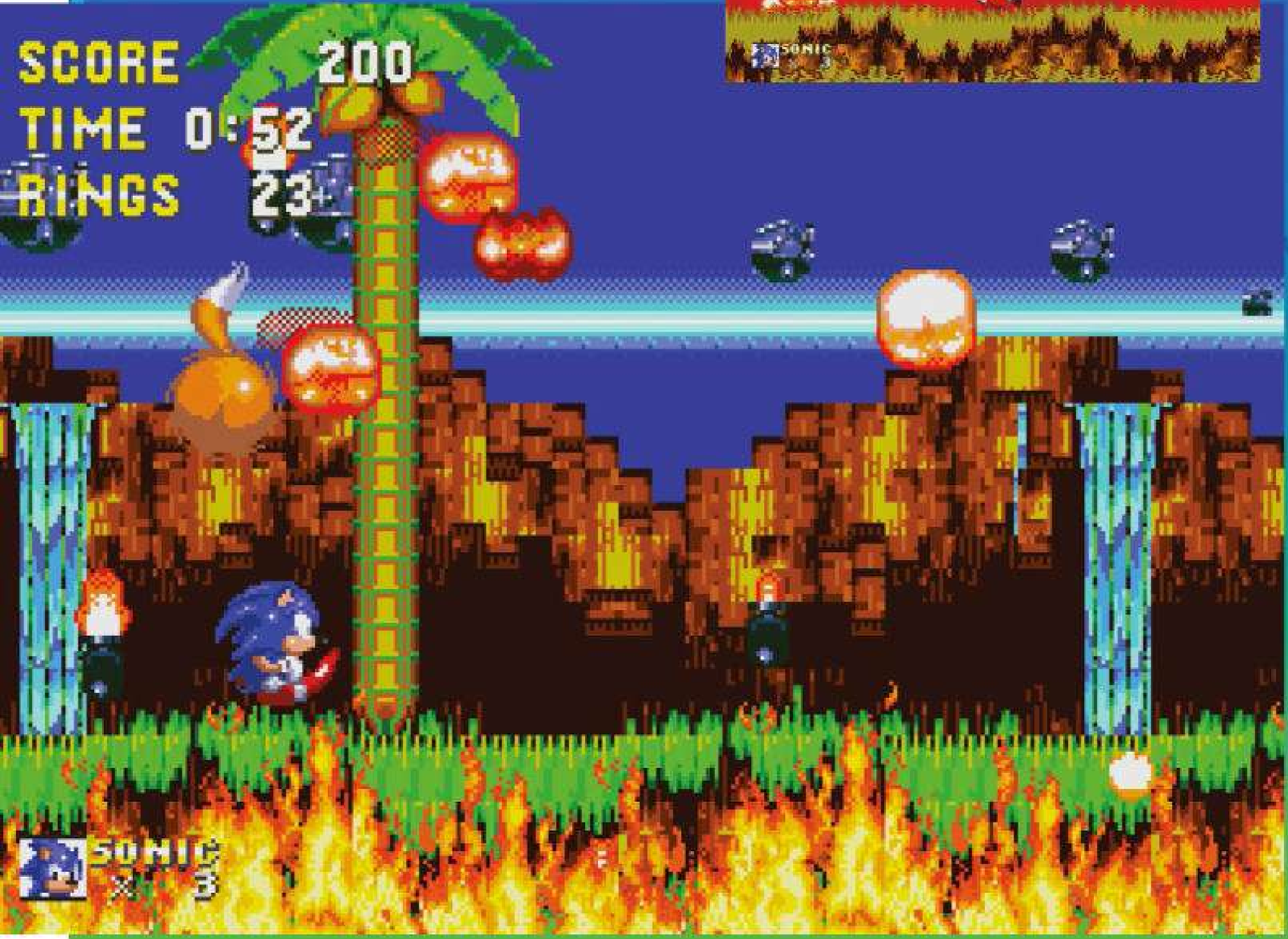
ISLAND ON FIRE

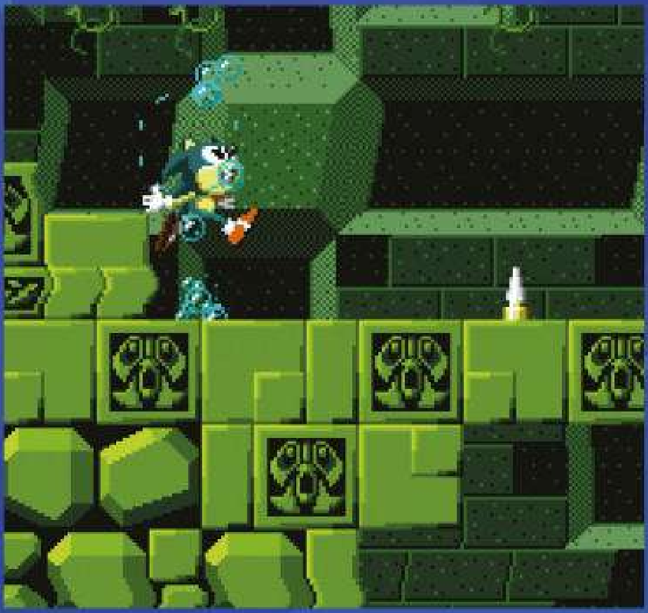
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3, MEGA DRIVE, 1994

We're kind of cheating here, because *Sonic 3*'s opening zone is memorable for all sorts of reasons and not just because you meet Knuckles for the first time. As you dash through the verdant zone with Tails in tow, you're blown away by how lush and gorgeous Angel Island looks. Before long you encounter a mid-level boss which bombards you with rockets, leading to a wall of fire that completely obliterates the once-leafy island. Things then take a more sinister turn as the tranquil scenery is replaced with a scorched wasteland.

Your steely resolve to retrieve the Chaos Emeralds is tested when you have to deal not only with the robot that caused the fiery conflagration in the first place, but also with a gigantic overhead machine that rains down rockets on you, further devastating the ravaged island. After that danger's been dealt with you've barely got time to breathe before you notice the shadowy figure of Robotnik approaching in the background. And that's when the true fight for Angel Island's liberation begins. Good luck!







ONE LAST BREATH

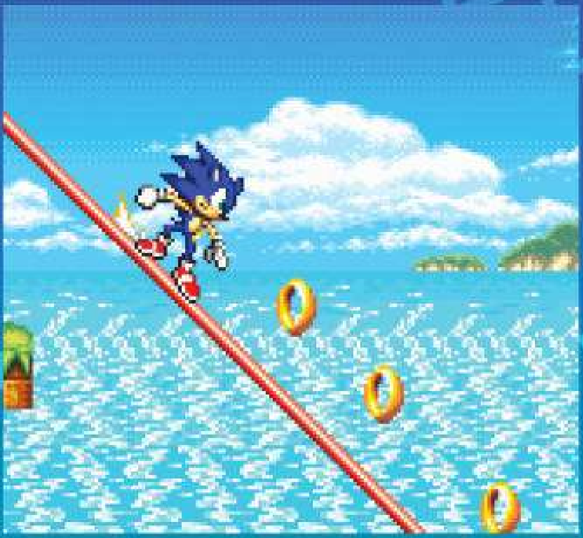
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, MEGA DRIVE, 1991

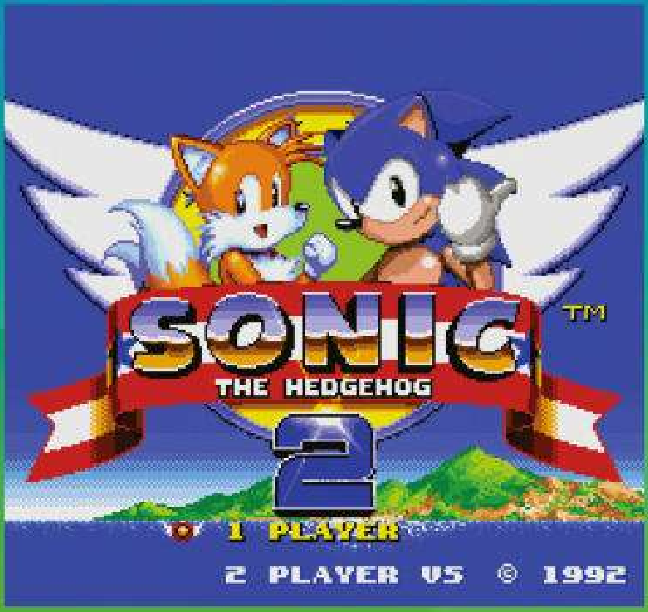
Aside from the entirety of *Sonic 2006,* few Sonic moments are as excruciatingly painful as potentially running out of breath while underwater. The mechanic is introduced in *Sonic The Hedgehog* and it's a harrowing ordeal. Sonic is already sluggish from being underwater and the dramatic music that plays out as your air supply diminishes only heightens the terror. The relief that comes from filling Sonic's lungs from a handily placed air bubble is really quite something.

SONIC THE TURNCOAT

SONIC ADVANCE, GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2001

Nowadays playing *Sonic* games on a Nintendo console is a common occurrence, but in the Nineties it was absolutely unthinkable. The impossible happened in 2001 when, fresh from announcing it would no longer make consoles, Sega released *Sonic Advance* later that same year. It may have felt strange to see your beloved hero on a rival system, but Sega's loss was ultimately Sonic's gain as he's now more popular than ever.





A DAY TO REMEMBER

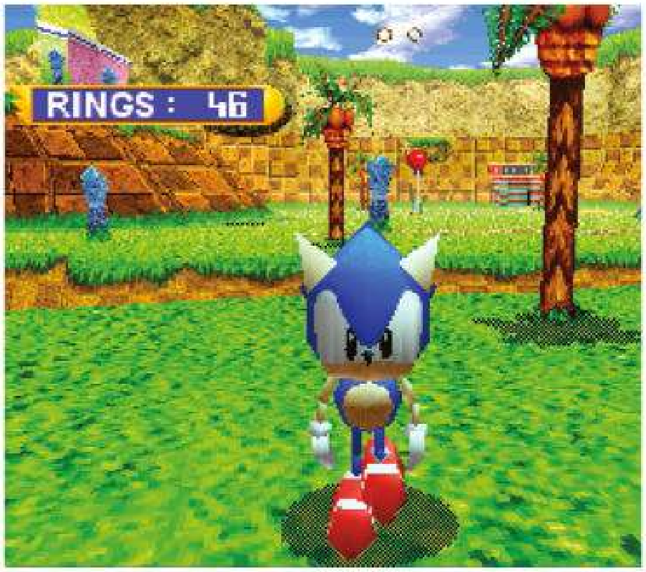
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2, MEGA DRIVE, 1992

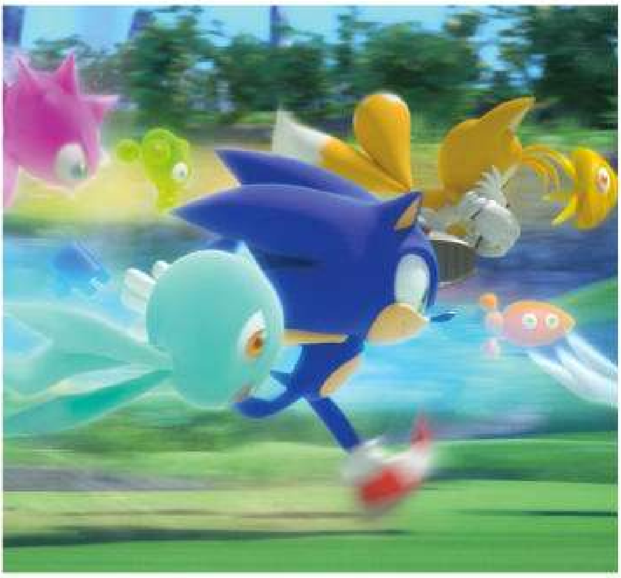
If you needed further proof of Sonic's rapidly growing popularity, consider all the stops Sega pulled out for the launch of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. Sega spared no expense to push its new *Sonic* game, blowing $10 million on advertising and releasing the game simultaneously in both Europe and the US, which was virtually unheard of at the time. The result was Sonic 2sday and the excitement it generated is hard for fans to forget.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

SONIC JAM, SATURN, 1997

While Sonic had negotiated 3D landscapes before with *SegaSonic The Hedgehog* and *Sonic 3D: Flickies' Island, Sonic Jam* was the real deal with polygons and everything. Granted it wasn't a conventional *Sonic* game, but exploring Sonic World was still tremendous fun all the same, offering plenty to explore and do. It also gave a tantalising glimpse of what a proper 3D *Sonic* game could be like and that was huge at the time.





WONDERFUL WISPS

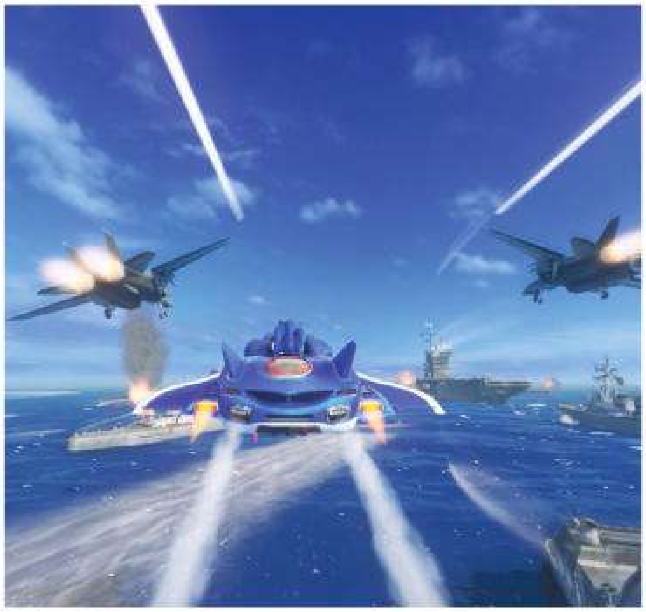
SONIC COLOURS, WII, 2010

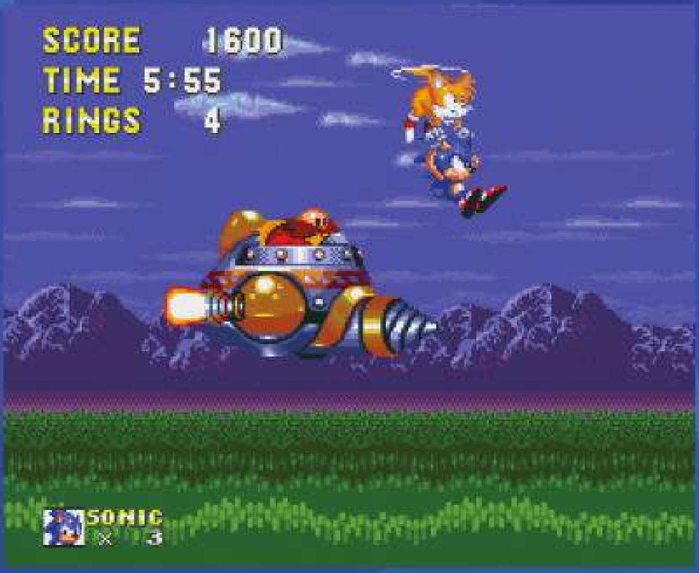
Unlike Mario, Sonic's 3D outings haven't always delivered, which is one reason why *Sonic Colours* remains so celebrated. Not only did it nail so many of the series' base mechanics, it also introduced the Wisps: fantastic beings that bestow Sonic with all manner of cool abilities. Utilising the Wisps' skills turned *Colours* into a more puzzle-like experience and also proved that even after 20 years, Sonic still had the power to surprise.

SEGA FOREVER

SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED, VARIOUS, 2012

If you love Sonic, there's a good chance you love Sega too and Sumo's game represents the ultimate fusion of fan service and solid game mechanics. Whether you're racing through Curien Mansion, passing grounded dragons or flying past the jets from *After Burner* you're constantly assaulted by Sega's past and it's absolutely glorious. The fact Sonic is one of the game's most balanced drivers is the icing on the cake.





AERIAL ASSAULT

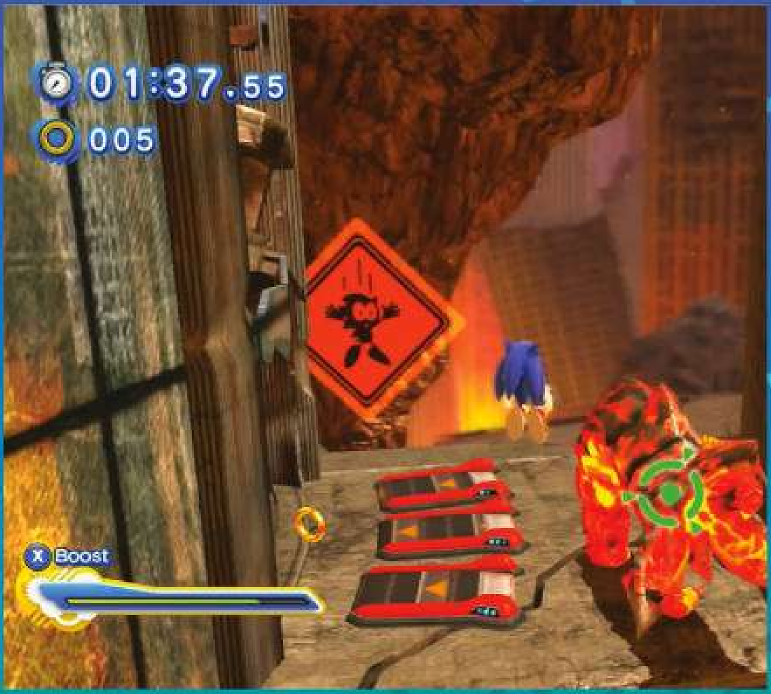
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3, MEGA DRIVE, 1994

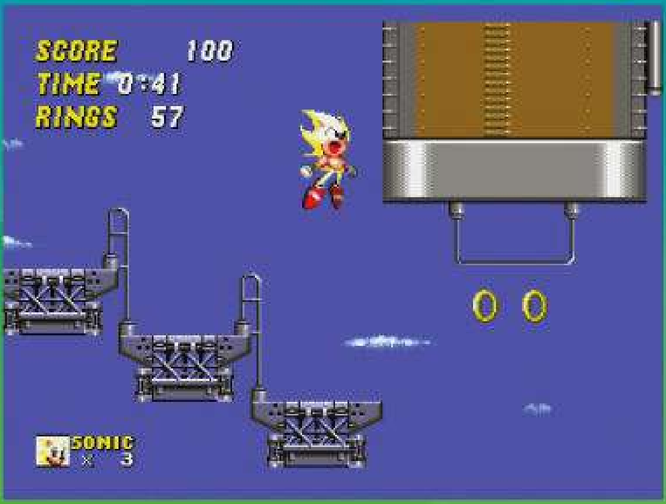
For a genius, Robotnik seems a bit dim. It takes him three games to work out that Sonic can't be fast if there's no ground for him to run on. Unfortunately for the evil engineer, even drilling Marble Garden Zone to bits doesn't grant him the results he desires, as Tails airlifts Sonic to safety and enables him to fight from the sky in one of the series' most unusual boss battles.

CRISIS RESOLVED

SONIC GENERATIONS, VARIOUS, 2011

When we first learned that *Sonic 2006* would be represented in *Sonic Generations*, it seemed an odd fit – was that disaster really worth celebrating? Sonic Team came good though, turning Crisis City into one of the game's most exciting stages. Racing through the crumbling metropolis is thrilling as modern Sonic, but it's the classic stage that makes it so memorable, with the end post flying away in a dramatic false finish.

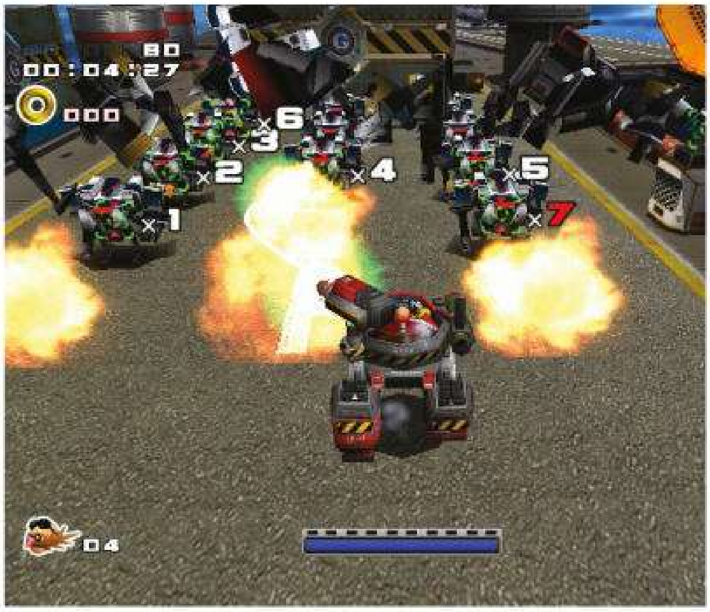




SUPER SONIC

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2, MEGA DRIVE, 1992

Getting seven Chaos Emeralds in Sonic's second outing can be a painful affair, but the reward is so very sweet. Grab 50 rings, jump into the air and Sonic will transform into the glowing yellow Super Sonic – an even faster version of himself with invincibility. It isn't tough to compensate for the drawback, a loss of ring per second, as Super Sonic's power turns otherwise difficult challenges into trivial matters.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04

BE THE BADDIE

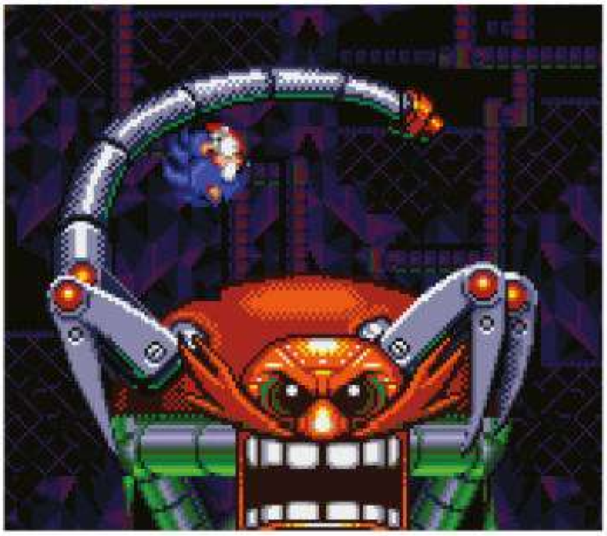
SONIC ADVENTURE 2, DREAMCAST, GAMECUBE, 2001

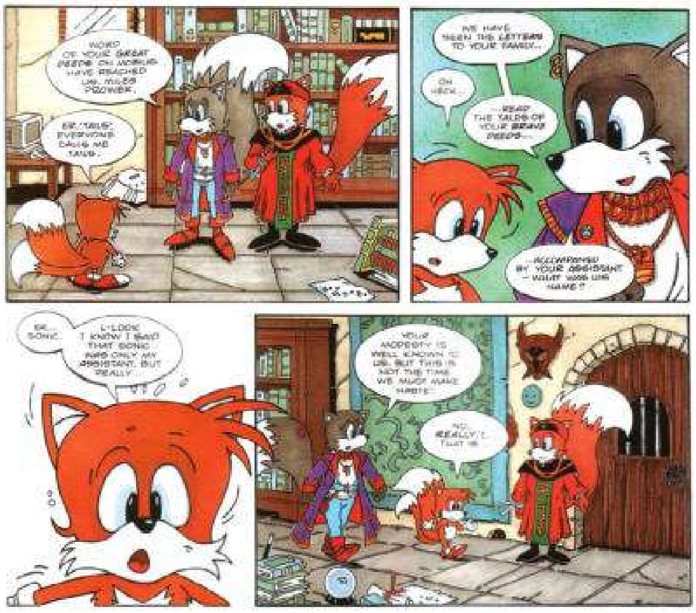
Sonic's tenth anniversary outing was the first mainline game to let you play as Robotnik, and villainy had never felt so good. What the dastardly doctor lacks in speed, he makes up for in destructive force, thanks to a laser cannon that fires homing shots towards anything that gets in his way. Sonic's eternal enemy feels like a force to be reckoned with. Bad feels good.

A NEW LEVEL OF TERROR

SONIC SPINBALL, MEGA DRIVE, 1993

While this *Sonic* spin-off is well-known for its brutally tough difficulty, that's not the reason for its inclusion here. Nope, we're adding *Sonic Spinball* because of the horrifying boss that greets you at the end of its first stage. Not only does it look absolutely terrifying, being a freakish cross between a metallic scorpion and Robotnik, it also lets out ear-piercing shrieks whenever you hit it. It's the stuff of nightmares.



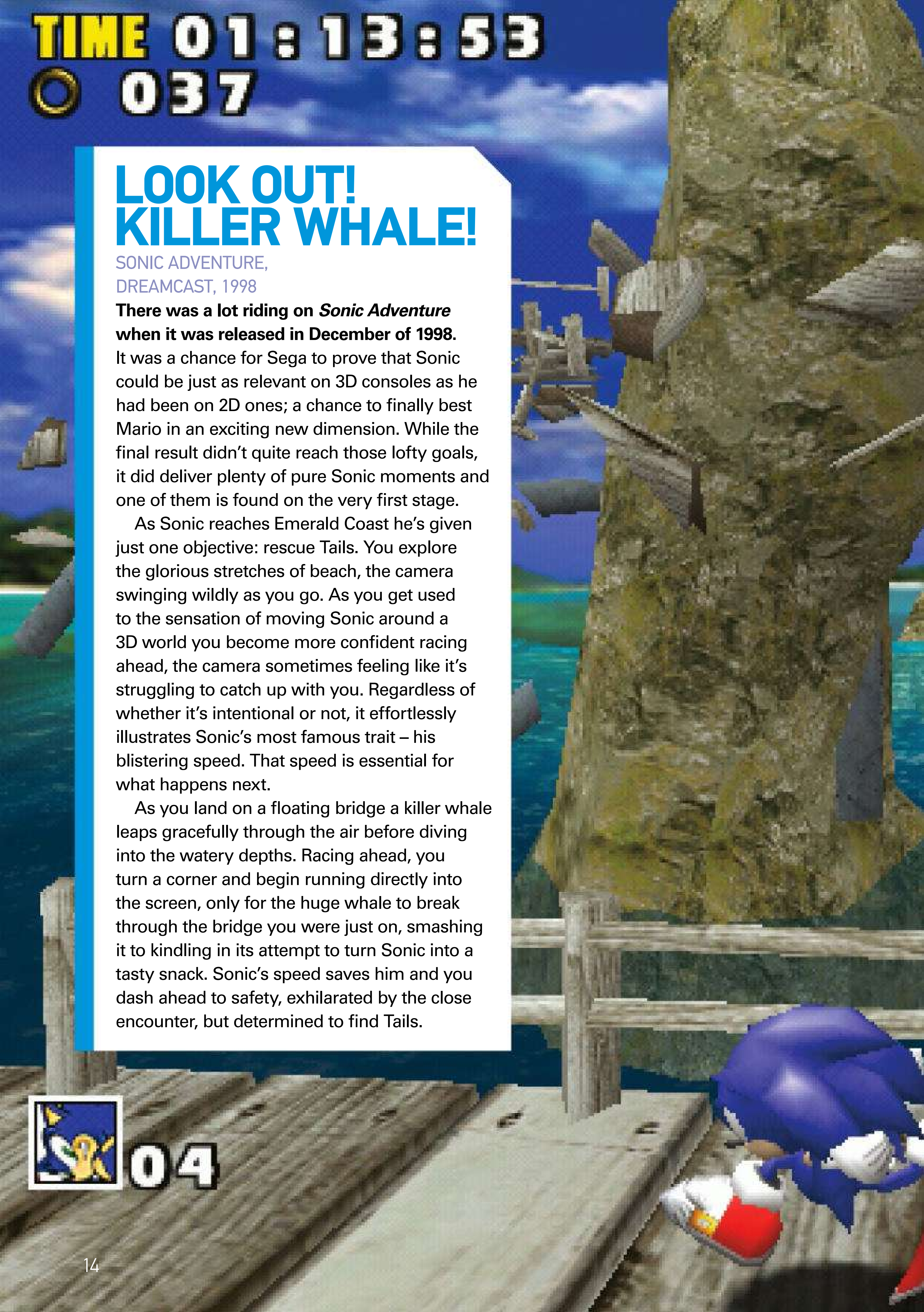

WORD OF YOUR GREAT DEEDS ON MOBIUS HAVE REACHED US, MILES PROWER.
ER, 'TAILS'. EVERYONE CALLS ME TAILS.
WE HAVE SEEN THE LETTERS TO YOUR FAMILY...
OH HECK...
...READ THE TALES OF YOUR BRAVE DEEDS...
...ACCOMPANIED BY YOUR ASSISTANT – WHAT WAS HIS NAME?
ER... SONIC.
L-LOOK I KNOW I SAID THAT SONIC WAS ONLY MY ASSISTANT, BUT REALLY...
YOUR MODESTY IS WELL KNOWN TO US, BUT THIS IS NOT THE TIME. WE MUST MAKE HASTE!
NO, REALLY! I... THAT IS...

TAILS GOES SOLO

ALL-OUT ACTION WITH THE SEGA SUPERSTARS
Sonic the comic
SEGA
PROWER POWER!
NEW TAILS STORY STARTS INSIDE!

SONIC THE COMIC, 1993

Sonic's sidekick doesn't get a whole bunch of attention of his own, but the UK's *Sonic The Comic* did give him his own strips. Unfortunately, he exaggerated his own heroism when writing letters home, leading people to frequently put him in situations where he's well over his head. Some might like him portrayed as being more competent, but these were some of the funniest strips of the comic's long run.



LOOK OUT! KILLER WHALE!

SONIC ADVENTURE,
DREAMCAST, 1998

There was a lot riding on *Sonic Adventure* when it was released in December of 1998. It was a chance for Sega to prove that Sonic could be just as relevant on 3D consoles as he had been on 2D ones; a chance to finally best Mario in an exciting new dimension. While the final result didn't quite reach those lofty goals, it did deliver plenty of pure Sonic moments and one of them is found on the very first stage.

As Sonic reaches Emerald Coast he's given just one objective: rescue Tails. You explore the glorious stretches of beach, the camera swinging wildly as you go. As you get used to the sensation of moving Sonic around a 3D world you become more confident racing ahead, the camera sometimes feeling like it's struggling to catch up with you. Regardless of whether it's intentional or not, it effortlessly illustrates Sonic's most famous trait – his blistering speed. That speed is essential for what happens next.

As you land on a floating bridge a killer whale leaps gracefully through the air before diving into the watery depths. Racing ahead, you turn a corner and begin running directly into the screen, only for the huge whale to break through the bridge you were just on, smashing it to kindling in its attempt to turn Sonic into a tasty snack. Sonic's speed saves him and you dash ahead to safety, exhilarated by the close encounter, but determined to find Tails.

CAN YOU FEEL THE SUNSHINE?

SUMMER OF SONIC, 2006-2016

The world's fastest hedgehog happens to have one of the most dedicated fan communities in the world, and there's no better example of that than Summer Of Sonic. What began as an online celebration of the series' 15th anniversary in 2006 became a UK-based fan convention in 2008, organised by Svend Joscelyne and Kevin Eva. The event soon became an annual gathering with Sega's official backing, and the free tickets were often snapped up within seconds.

The events were everything a Sonic fan could want, celebrating all aspects of Sonic fandom. Attendees could expect to see both official game trailers and fan-made animations on stage, and live interviews would be followed up with cosplay contests. Both forthcoming games and classics were made available to play, and rare merchandise was on display and sometimes even up for sale. You could even meet developers such as Yuji Naka and Takashi Iizuka, and enjoy live musical performances from the likes of Crush 40.

The last annual Summer Of Sonic took place in 2013, but the team organised a one-off 25th anniversary event in 2016 and the Sonic Adventure Music Experience show in 2019. Here's hoping we'll see the convention return in the future.

SUMMER OF SONIC

Summer Of Sonic photos by Anthony Flemate

Crush 40
Crush 40

DOUBLE VISION

SONIC GENERATIONS, VARIOUS, 2011

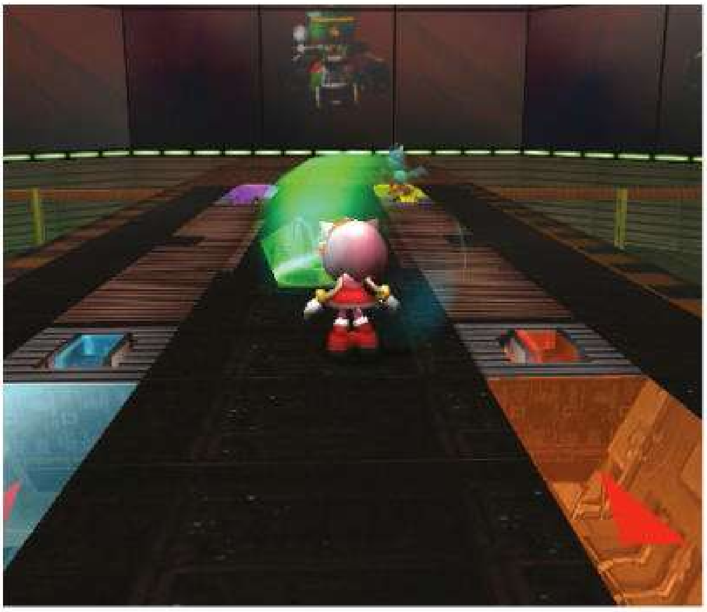
Reinvention is the key to longevity, and Sonic has had to keep up with the times like any other superstar. So what does he see when he looks in the mirror? Is it the shorter, pudgier hedgehog of 1991, or the green-eyed motormouth we're more familiar with today? The answer is both, but also neither, since he's not looking in a mirror at all – due to the disruption in time in *Sonic Generations*, the two can coexist. That's a good job too, because when the world is in danger, the only thing better than having Sonic to deal with the threat is having two Sonics to do the job.

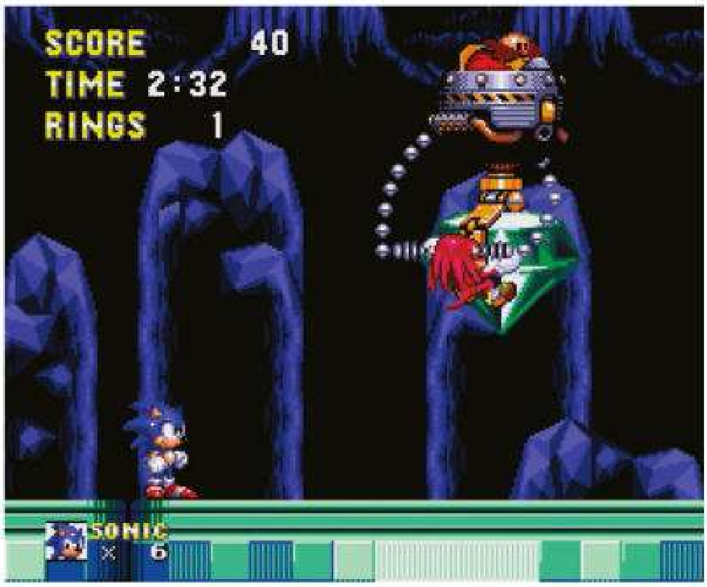
This gets even better as the game goes on, because Tails also makes the journey from the Mega Drive to the modern day to provide an extra dose of intelligence to the team. They'll need it too, because the twist is that as well as harnessing the power of the Time Eater, Sonic's arch-nemesis has teamed up with his own past self. This even leads to the game's best gag, as Tails remarks that it's Dr Robotnik from the past, only to be met with the rebuff, "Nobody calls me that any more!"

ZERO ESCAPE

SONIC ADVENTURE, DREAMCAST, 1998

When Amy encounters a big video wall next to a block puzzle in Hot Shelter, it's easy to assume that solving it will clear the flickering static and show something interesting. It does, but it's the unfriendly face of Zero, Amy's relentless robotic pursuer. As the baddie starts flailing wildly, you barely have time to wonder where he is before he crashes right through the wall. The chase is on!





TRUCE TIME

SONIC & KNUCKLES, MEGA DRIVE, 1994

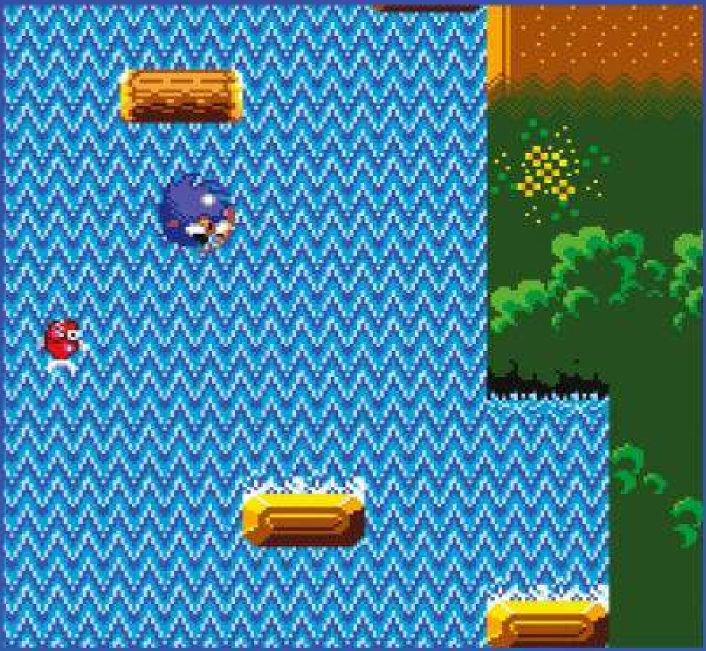
Being betrayed by Robotnik hasn't warmed Knuckles up to Sonic, with the echidna taking every opportunity to thwart his speedy foe. The two finally come to blows in Hidden Palace Zone, allowing Robotnik to make off with the Master Emerald. Knuckles finally realises that he needs Sonic's help after failing to stop him, and beckons the hedgehog to follow him to Sky Sanctuary in a great bit of silent storytelling.

OLYMPIC GOLD

TOKYO OLYMPIC GAMES 2020, TOKYO, 2021

Japan chose to celebrate its considerable contribution to videogames during the opening ceremony of the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, with an orchestral medley featuring music from the likes of *Final Fantasy, Gradius* and *Soulcalibur*. No stranger to the Olympics, Sonic was represented as a part of this cultural celebration too, with the Star Light Zone theme from the very first game being played as Oman's athletes entered the stadium.

Sonic
Hard
P1
110m Hurdles



THE ONLY WAY IS UP

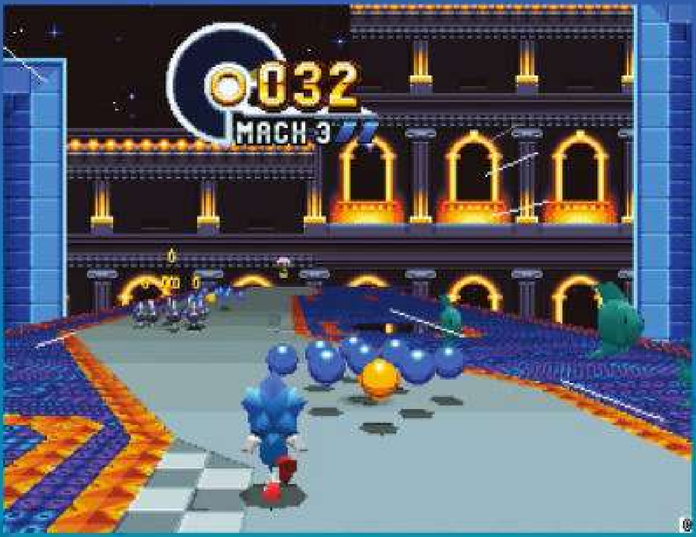
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, MASTER SYSTEM, 1991

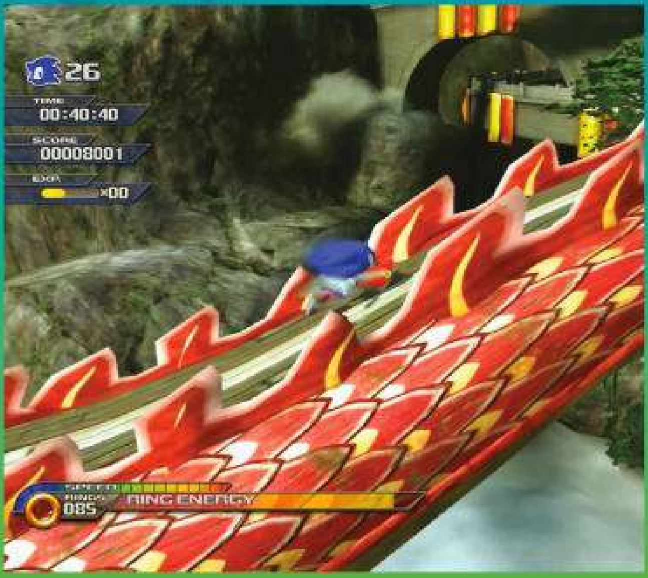
Far from being a compromised conversion of its 16-bit counterpart, *Sonic The Hedgehog* on the Master System was a challenging platform game with plenty of ideas of its own. Jungle Zone Act 2 is an unusual vertical stage design, in which you undertake an ascent to the top of a waterfall. Falling to the bottom of the screen will kill Sonic instantly, making for a memorable and extremely perilous stage.

UFO CATCHER

SONIC MANIA, VARIOUS, 2017

Although *Sonic Mania* includes the *Sonic 3* special stages, a brand-new special stage was designed for collecting Chaos Emeralds, and it's a delight. Drawing inspiration from *Sonic CD*, this one requires you to chase a UFO around a racetrack, collecting items to boost your speed and rings to extend the time limit. It's one of the series' best, and the Saturn-style polygonal graphics are the icing on the cake.



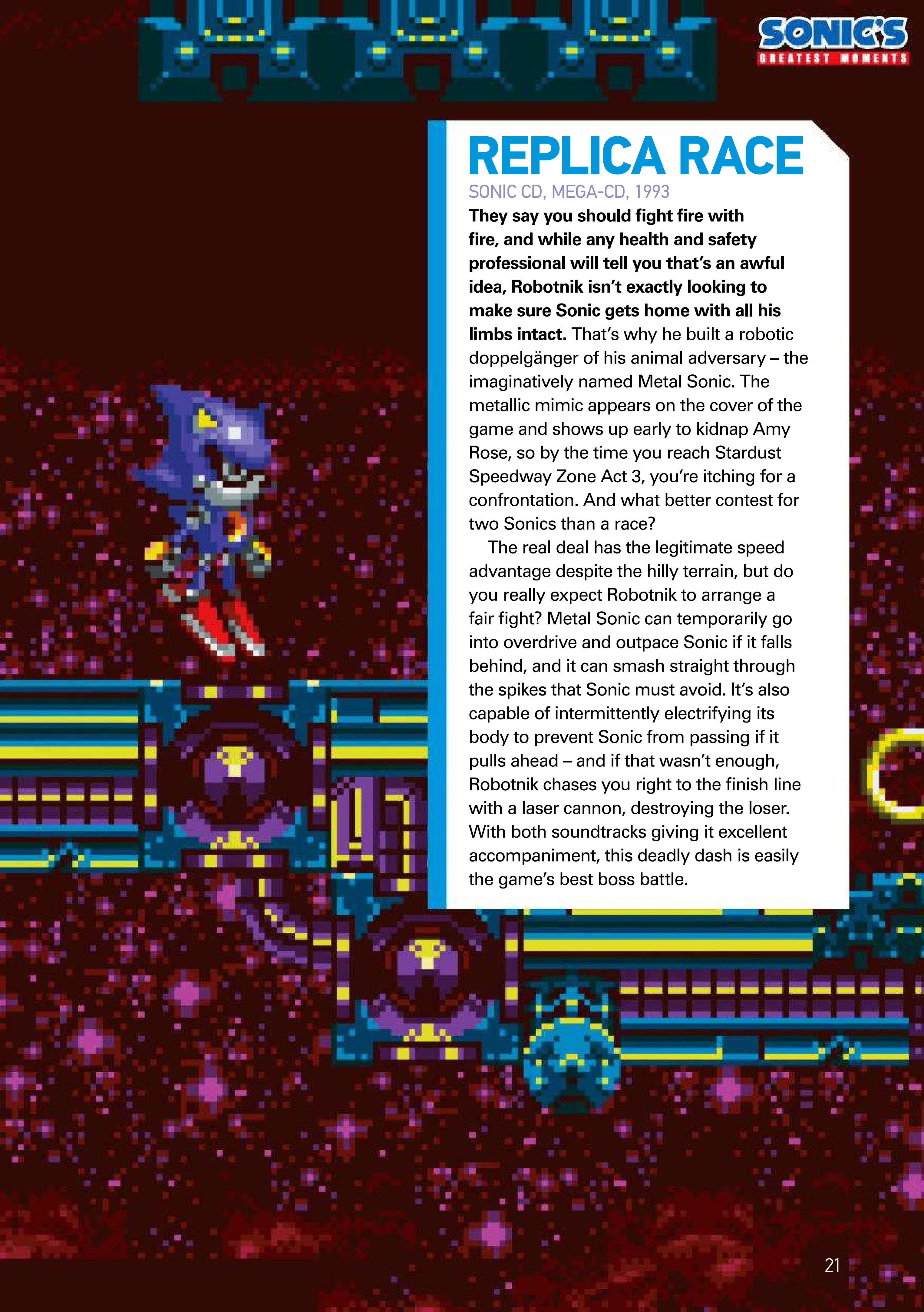


TAKE THE DRAGON ROAD

SONIC UNLEASHED, XBOX 360, PS3, 2008

***Sonic*'s 3D gameplay was given a radical overhaul in *Sonic Unleashed*, and few stages show it off better than Chun-Nan's Dragon Road.** Inspired by Chinese architecture, the stage allows you to run along twisting, looping pathways along the backs of magnificent dragons, intertwined with rails to grind on. You'll even get to boost along a river and launch into the air on fireworks in this thrill ride of a level.

SCORE 0
TIME 1'23"16
RINGS 1
F x 5

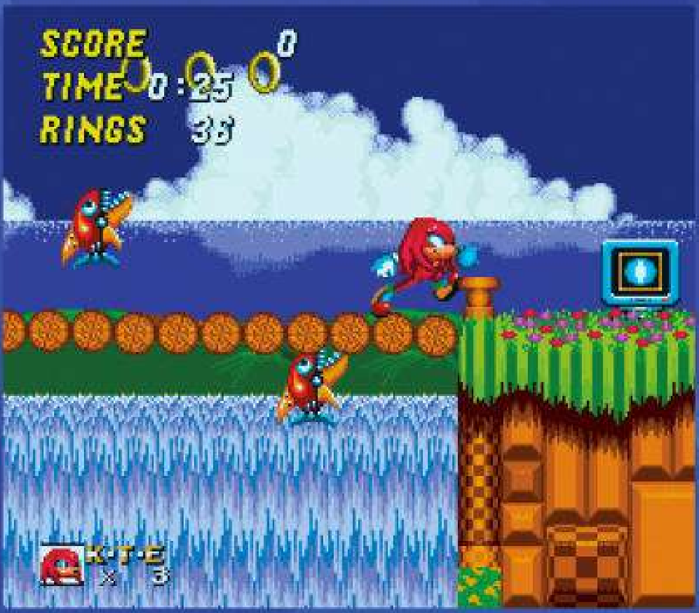


REPLICA RACE

SONIC CD, MEGA-CD, 1993

They say you should fight fire with fire, and while any health and safety professional will tell you that's an awful idea, Robotnik isn't exactly looking to make sure Sonic gets home with all his limbs intact. That's why he built a robotic doppelgänger of his animal adversary – the imaginatively named Metal Sonic. The metallic mimic appears on the cover of the game and shows up early to kidnap Amy Rose, so by the time you reach Stardust Speedway Zone Act 3, you're itching for a confrontation. And what better contest for two Sonics than a race?

The real deal has the legitimate speed advantage despite the hilly terrain, but do you really expect Robotnik to arrange a fair fight? Metal Sonic can temporarily go into overdrive and outpace Sonic if it falls behind, and it can smash straight through the spikes that Sonic must avoid. It's also capable of intermittently electrifying its body to prevent Sonic from passing if it pulls ahead – and if that wasn't enough, Robotnik chases you right to the finish line with a laser cannon, destroying the loser. With both soundtracks giving it excellent accompaniment, this deadly dash is easily the game's best boss battle.



NEW DISCOVERIES

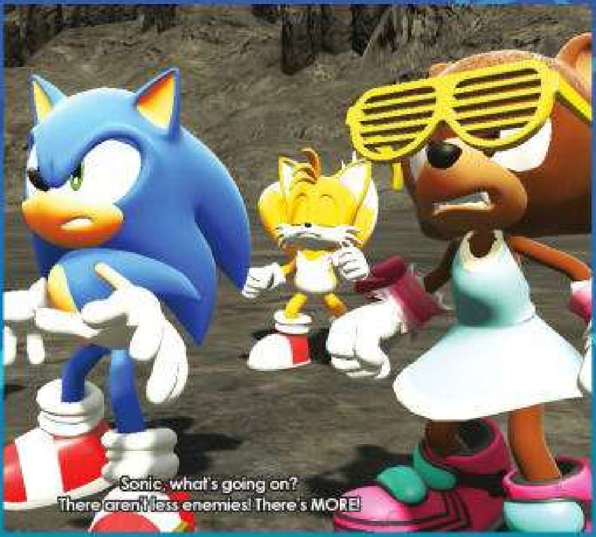
SONIC & KNUCKLES, MEGA DRIVE, 1994

While *Sonic & Knuckles* is a great game in its own right, it's enhanced by the 'lock-on technology' squirrelled away inside its cartridge. Slotting previous *Sonic* games into the cart either creates one giant new adventure (*Sonic 3*), lets you play as Knuckles (*Sonic 2*), or lets you play multiple bonus stages (*Sonic 1*). It's a great moment for Sonic fans, more so because it's rarely been replicated so well by Sega since.

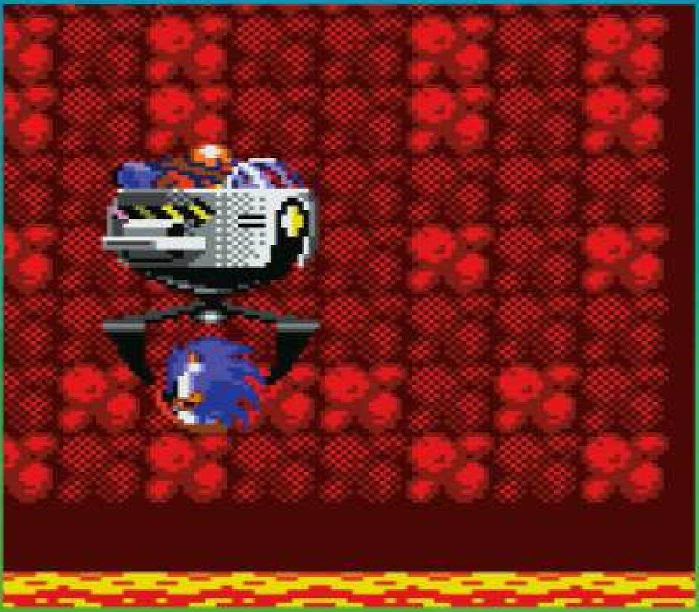
JUST HANGING OUT

SONIC FORCES, VARIOUS, 2017

If they were honest, most Sonic fans would love to star in a *Sonic* game. That's unlikely to ever happen, but *Sonic Forces* did at least offer fans the option to create a playable avatar that could stand shoulder to shoulder with the much-loved hero. While the game itself disappoints on numerous levels, seeing something you've lovingly crafted stand proud next to Sonic is something that few Sonic fans will ever forget.



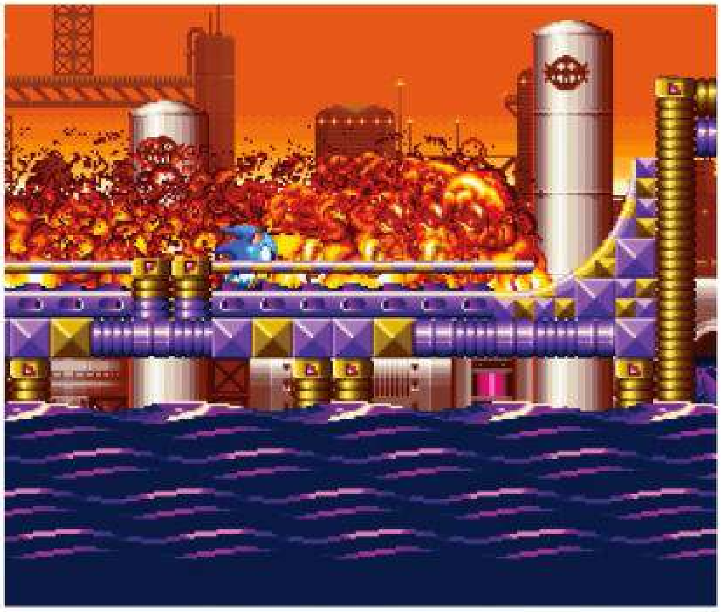
Sonic, what's going on?
There aren't less enemies! There's MORE!



FOE TURNED FRIEND?

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2, GAME GEAR, 1992

Sonic's second Game Gear adventure features a surprisingly sweet moment during Under Ground Zone Act 3. As Sonic speeds through the stage he runs straight off a mine track and plummets towards a pool of lava, only to be saved by Robotnik at the last moment. This isn't a moment of altruism, however: Robotnik wants to be the cause of Sonic's death, so he dumps him by one of the franchise's toughest bosses.



TWISTED FIRESTARTER

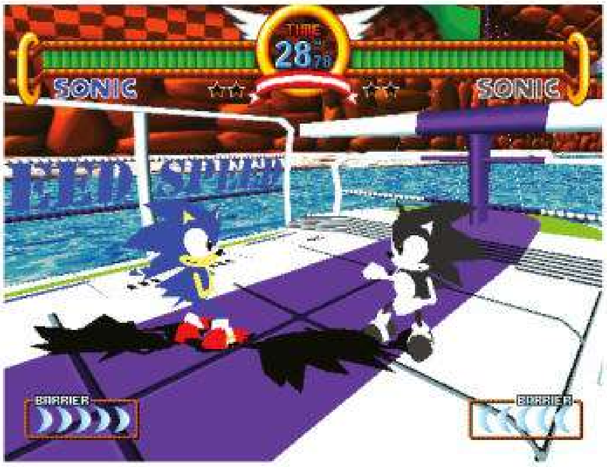
SONIC MANIA, VARIOUS, 2017

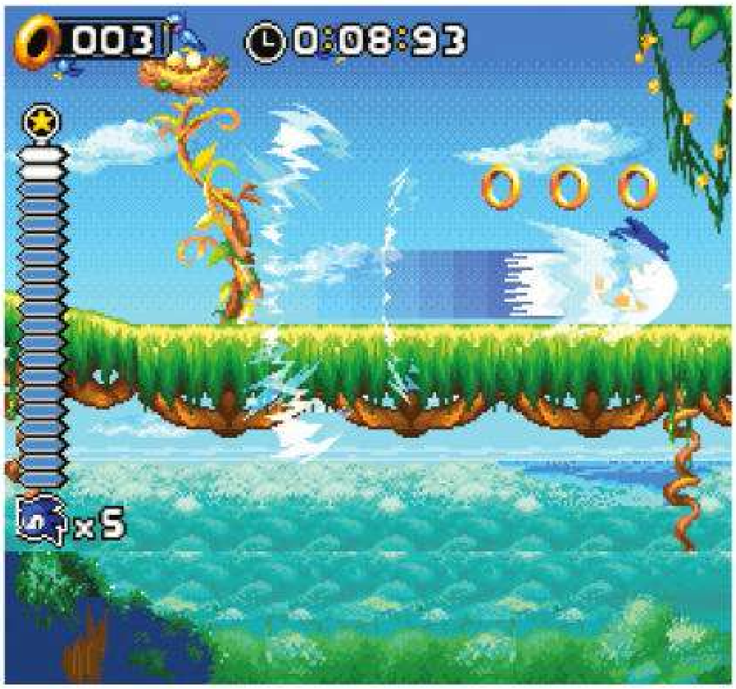
Even if you've played the early *Sonic* games to death, we're confident *Sonic Mania*'s clever utilisation of the Fire Shield will still surprise you. While it continues to protect you from a single hit, it can now affect the environment, meaning bridges burn as Sonic races over them, ice blocks melt and oil slicks can become deadly death traps. You don't expect it and it looks absolutely marvellous.

SEEING DOUBLE

SONIC CHAMPIONSHIP, ARCADE, 1996

Sega AM2's fighter gets a bad rep, with many failing to point out just how much humour is crammed into it. Its funniest moment happens after two players select the same fighter. Robotnik flies on-screen and uses a ray to split the shocked fighter in two. The two halves then stare agog at each other while Robotnik flies off, probably to cause more mayhem elsewhere.

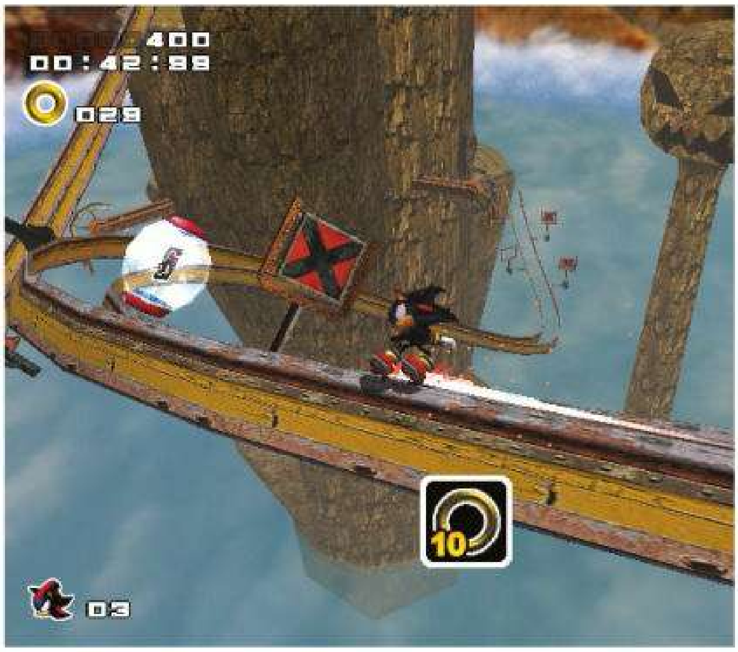




ADRENALINE RUSH

SONIC RUSH, DS, 2005

***Sonic* games have always been about speed, but *Sonic Rush* pushes the template so far and so successfully that its Tension Gauge mechanic has been worked into many later games.** The Gauge can be topped up by defeating enemies, performing tricks and picking up certain power-ups, and when it's completely full it boosts Sonic to incredible speeds. Needless to say, tearing across both DS screens while fully charged is something you don't soon forget.



RIDE THE RAILS

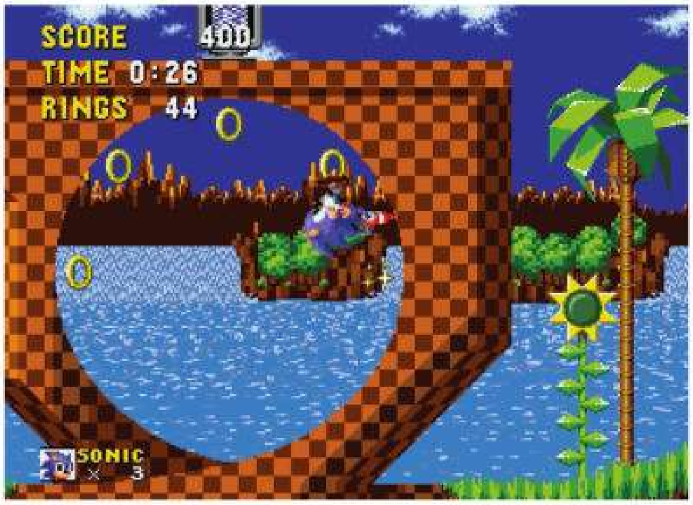
SONIC ADVENTURE 2, DREAMCAST, GAMECUBE, 2001

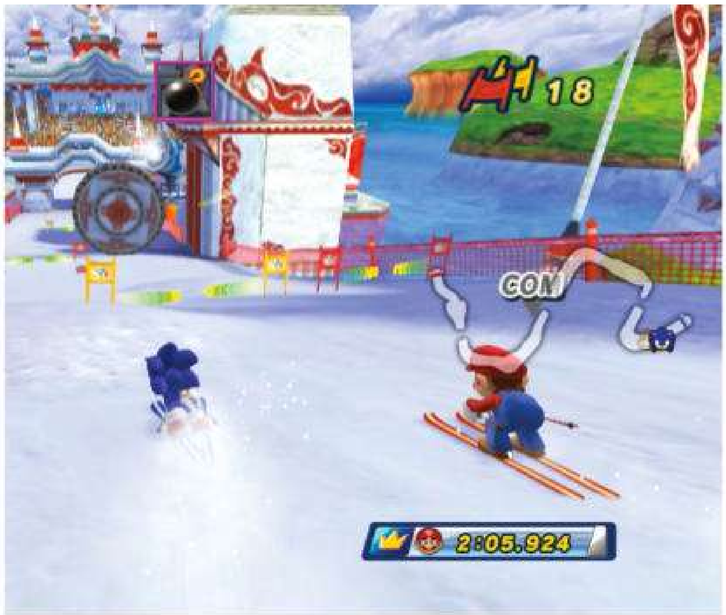
As an edgy chap who could grind rails like all those teens in Korn hoodies wished they could, Shadow was a perfect character for his time, and Sky Rail was really the ideal stage for him. As well as heavily featuring *Sonic Adventure 2*'s most prominent new mechanic, the music for the stage – the hilariously named track *Mr Unsmiley* – was a heavy rock piece that suited the action to a tee.

GOING LOOPY

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, MEGA DRIVE, 1991

Few obstacles in the *Sonic* games are as iconic as the relatively simple loops found in Green Hill Zone and Star Light Zone, but they impart an important lesson about speed and momentum on curved surfaces – you won't get through if you approach them too slowly. Plus, there's no denying how cool it looks the first time you manage to spin Sonic through one of them at top speed.

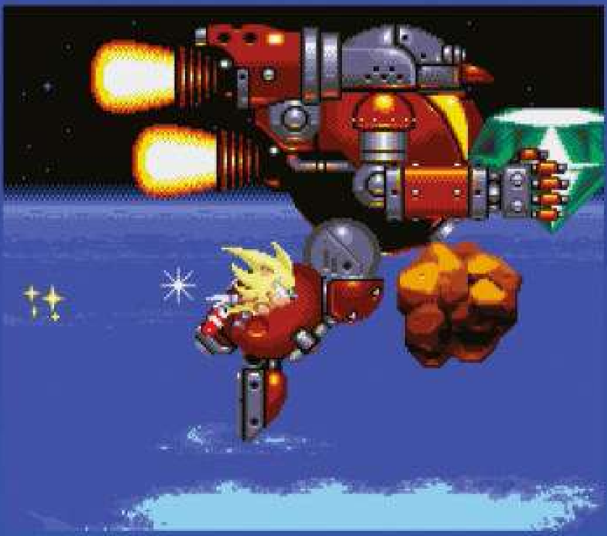




DREAM TEAM

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES, WII, 2009

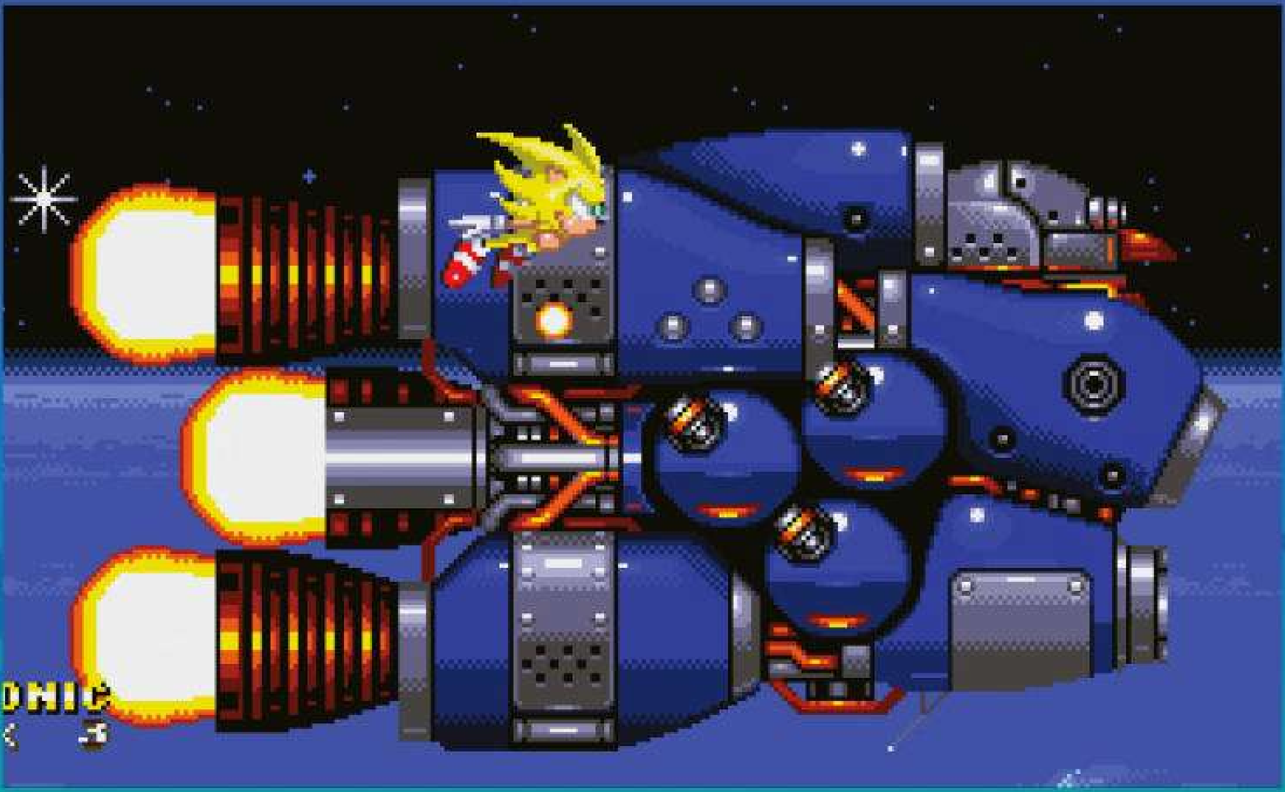
The first crossover between Nintendo and Sega's mascots was unexpected, but the sequel was a whole lot better. That's in large part due to the major expansion of the Dream Events, which add decidedly non-regulation obstacles and power-ups. This time you could ski through Seaside Hill or snowboard down Radical Highway, and even perform a figure skating routine in which you fight an icy version of *Sonic Adventure*'s Perfect Chaos.



SUPER SHOWDOWN

SONIC & KNUCKLES, MEGA DRIVE, 1994

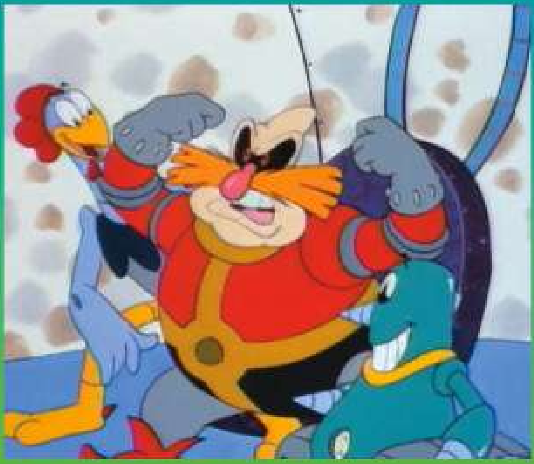
Bagging seven Chaos Emeralds was always a fun endeavour in the first few *Sonic* games, but *Sonic & Knuckles* made it so much cooler by rewarding you with an extra final stage. Flying through space as Super Sonic, you've got to dodge asteroids and collect rings while stopping Robotnik's last-ditch attempt to steal the Master Emerald, in a fight which provided a final boss template for decades to come.

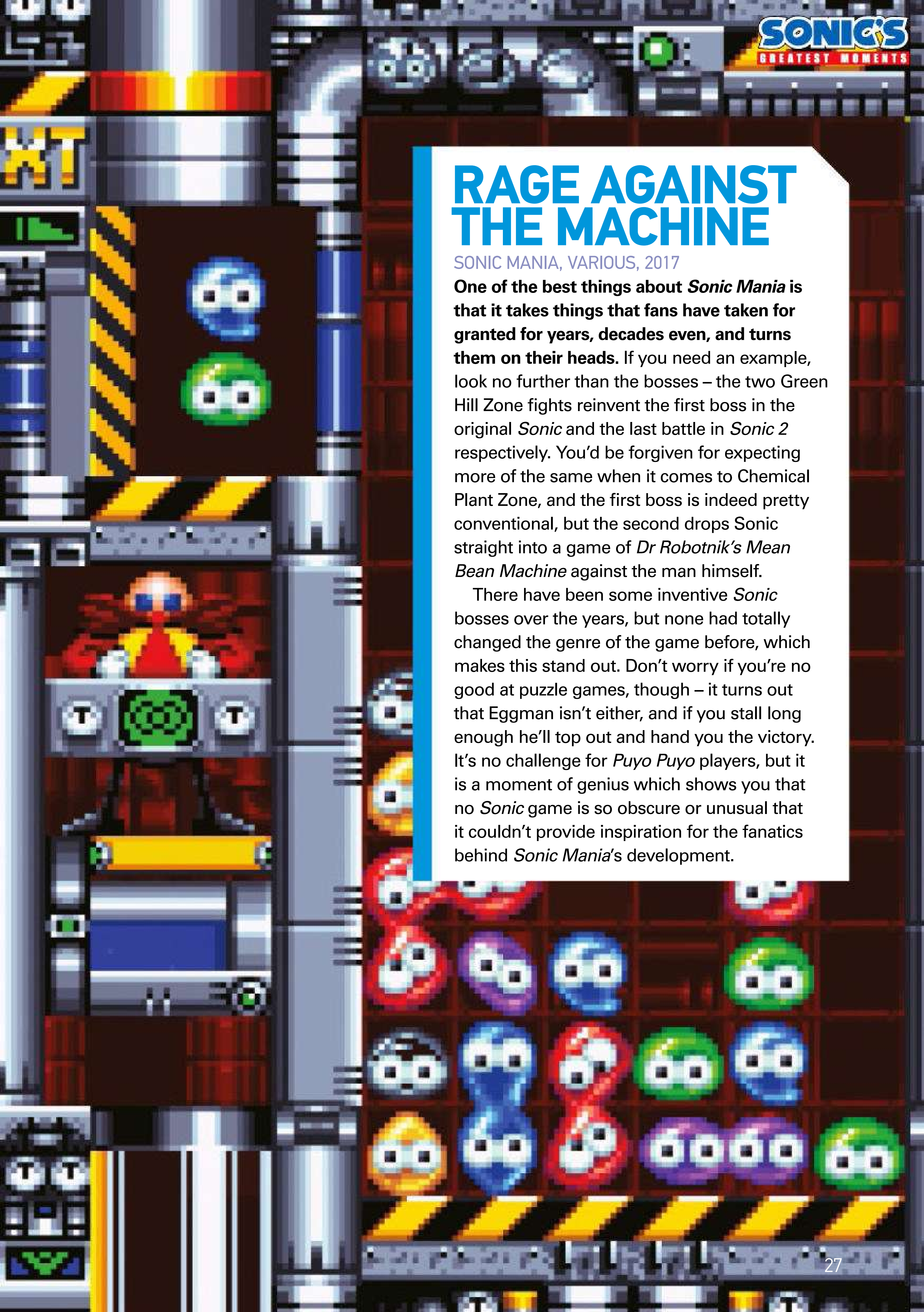


ANIMATED ANTICS

ADVENTURES OF SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, TV, 1993

Sonic fans of the early Nineties were soon spoiled for ways to enjoy their favourite character, and nothing illustrates that better than his first of many forays into TV, as he had not one but two cartoon series launched in September 1993. The comedic weekday outing *Adventures Of Sonic The Hedgehog* arrived first, while the more dramatic Saturday-morning show *Sonic The Hedgehog* inspired the long-running Archie-published comic series.





RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

SONIC MANIA, VARIOUS, 2017

One of the best things about *Sonic Mania* is that it takes things that fans have taken for granted for years, decades even, and turns them on their heads. If you need an example, look no further than the bosses – the two Green Hill Zone fights reinvent the first boss in the original *Sonic* and the last battle in *Sonic 2* respectively. You'd be forgiven for expecting more of the same when it comes to Chemical Plant Zone, and the first boss is indeed pretty conventional, but the second drops Sonic straight into a game of *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* against the man himself.

There have been some inventive *Sonic* bosses over the years, but none had totally changed the genre of the game before, which makes this stand out. Don't worry if you're no good at puzzle games, though – it turns out that Eggman isn't either, and if you stall long enough he'll top out and hand you the victory. It's no challenge for *Puyo Puyo* players, but it is a moment of genius which shows you that no *Sonic* game is so obscure or unusual that it couldn't provide inspiration for the fanatics behind *Sonic Mania*'s development.

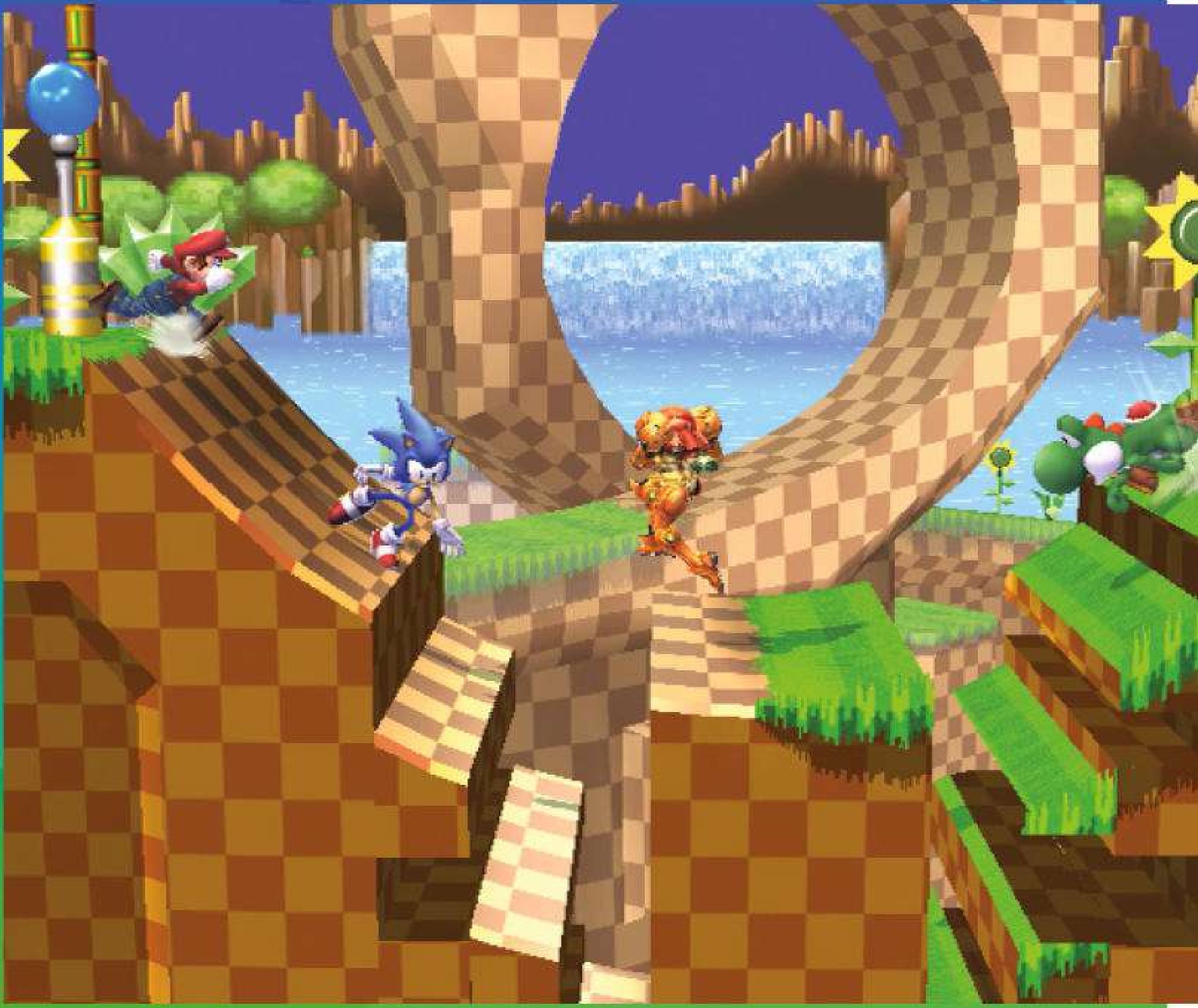
BASHING MARIO

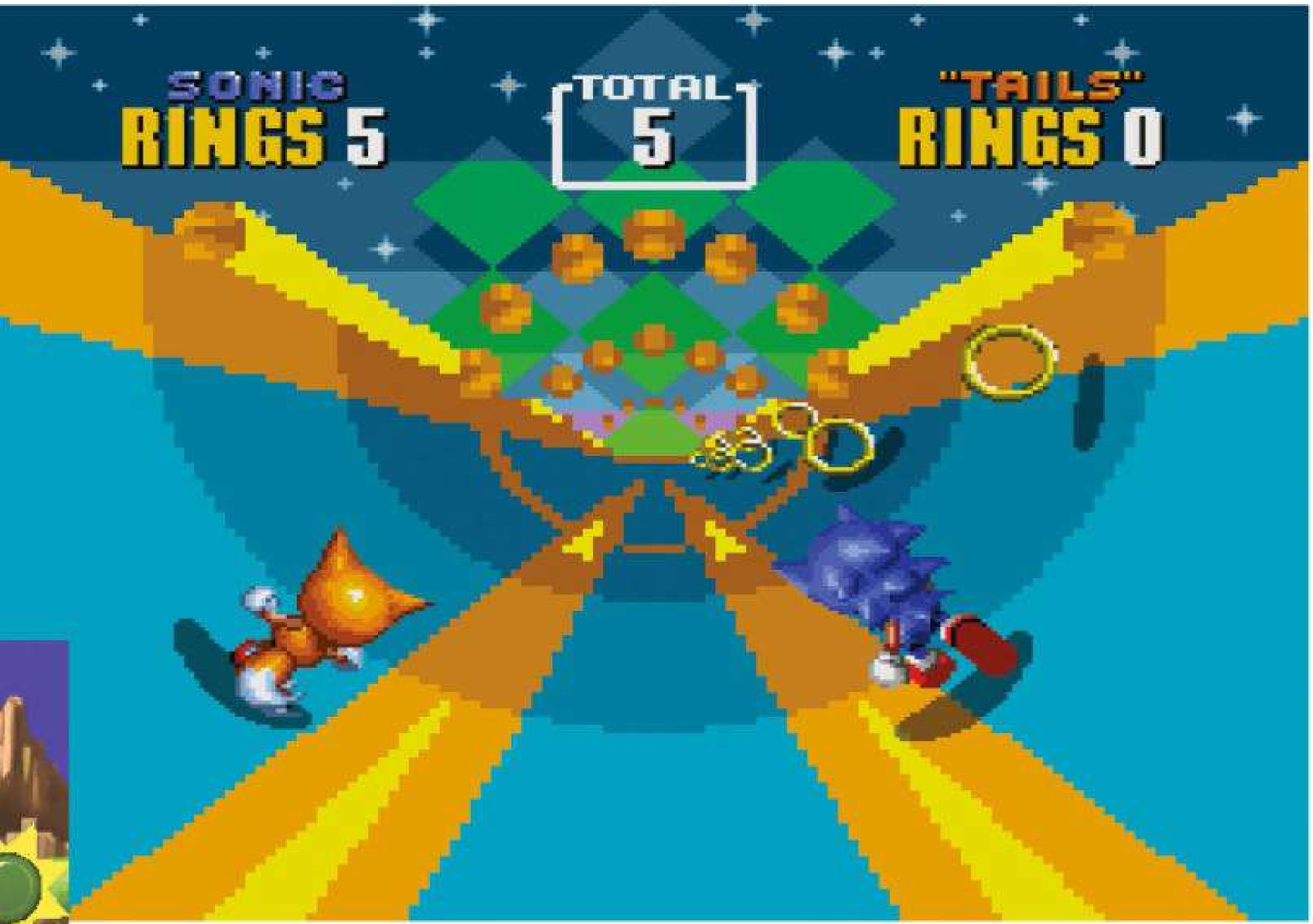
SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL, GAMECUBE, 2008

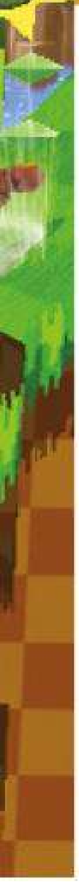
Who would win in a straight-up fight between Mario and Sonic? It's a question that humans have posed since the dawn of time... All right, well at least since the early Nineties, and in 2008, Nintendo and Sega finally allowed you to answer the question once and for all.

By the time *Super Smash Bros Brawl* came out, we'd already seen the unthinkable – namely Mario and Sonic starring in the same game. *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* may have arrived the previous year, but this time it was different. In the 2007 Wii release the pair had competed against each other fairly, but here the gloves were actually coming off. It was tremendously exciting for Sonic fans.

And why not? After all, Sonic was often the butt of jokes from Mario and Nintendo fans, so *Brawl* was your chance to settle the score by laying out Mario and all his mates. Sonic's moves shone when applied to combat situations, and even today it remains highly satisfying to use his well-loved moves to smash Mario right on his annoying moustache. Lovely.







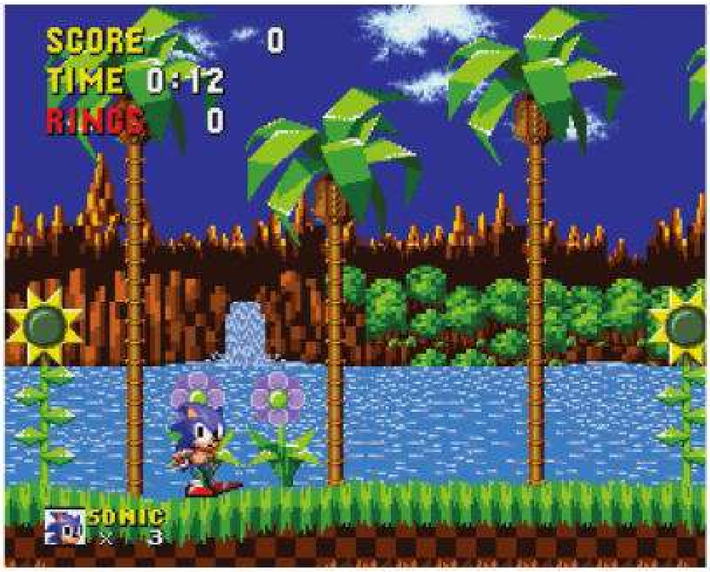
A TRULY SPECIAL STAGE

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2, MEGA DRIVE, 1992

Whenever you're making a sequel to anything, 'bigger, faster, better' is normally a good focus to have. *Sonic 2* complies with all these comparatives, and while the **Retro Gamer** team remains undecided on whether it is the best 16-bit 2D *Sonic* game, we do all agree that its bonus stages are phenomenal.

Allow us to paint a picture with our imagination brush. It's 1992 and you've just cleared *Sonic 2*'s first few zones and you're as excited as an excited person who has a special reason to be excited. That excitement stems from the knowledge that you're about to compete in one of the bonus stages you've seen in various previews and reviews. Your anticipation is high and with good reason, but nothing can prepare you for the real deal.

With Tails dutifully following your every move, you race forwards into the screen, grabbing gold rings as you go, eyes wide at the astonishing-looking visuals that power past you. It's a truly thrilling moment and like the excellent music that accompanies it, it's burned into your mind forever.



HURRY UP!

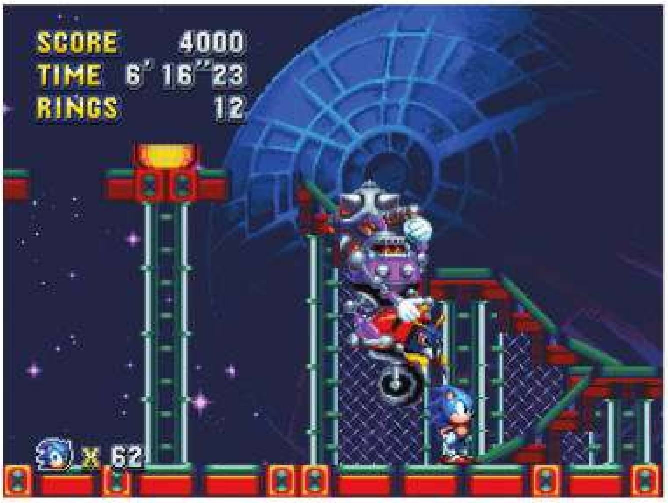
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG, MEGA DRIVE, 1991

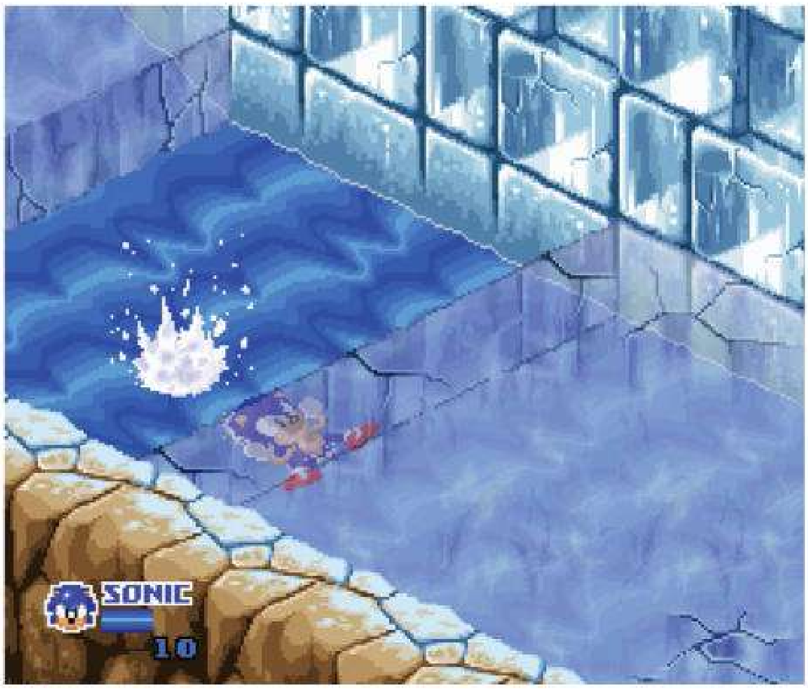
"Hedgehog with attitude" wasn't just a marketing slogan – Sonic was cool and confident from the very beginning, and didn't take kindly to players neglecting his need for speed. Leave the controller alone for a moment and Sonic starts to frown at the player and tap his foot impatiently, a neat little touch that gives the hero real character and advances the ideal of *Sonic* as being akin to a playable cartoon.

TEAM TRIBUTE

SONIC MANIA, VARIOUS, 2017

You'd expect long-term Sonic fans to get some deep references into *Sonic Mania*, but maybe the deepest of all is the tribute to the Sonic Retro user Polygon Jim, who passed away in 2013. Heavy Rider's steed Jimmy is a jumping Motobug, similar to the one in Polygon Jim's *Motobug In Sonic 1* ROM hack. Few will recognise it, but it means so much to the people who understand.

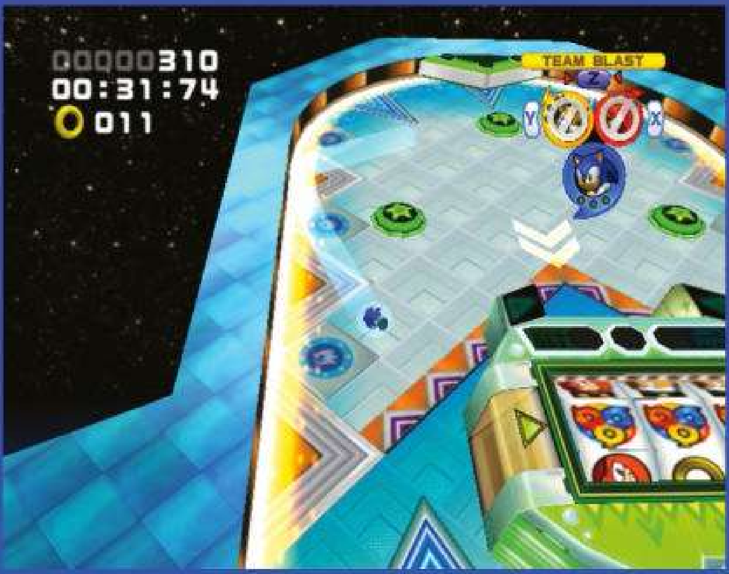




TRAPPED UNDER ICE

SEGASONIC THE HEDGEHOG, ARCADE, 1993

If Sonic's feeling a bit hot after racing through Volcanic Vault, this cute moment in Icy Isle is sure to cool him off quickly. Our hero starts the stage sliding down an icy slope with a river running beneath it, only to fall through a gap into the river. The poor little guy is squashed up against the ice, dragged along by the current until another gap finally frees him.



LEGS 11

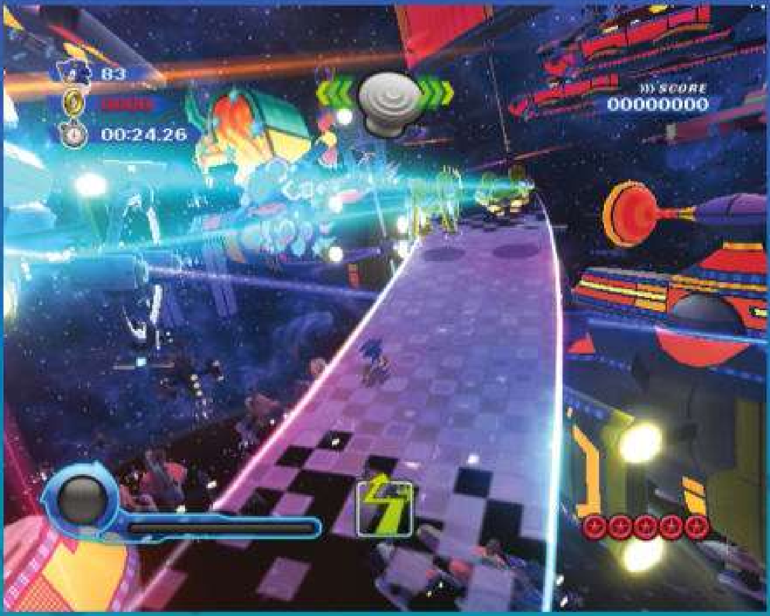
SONIC HEROES, VARIOUS, 2003

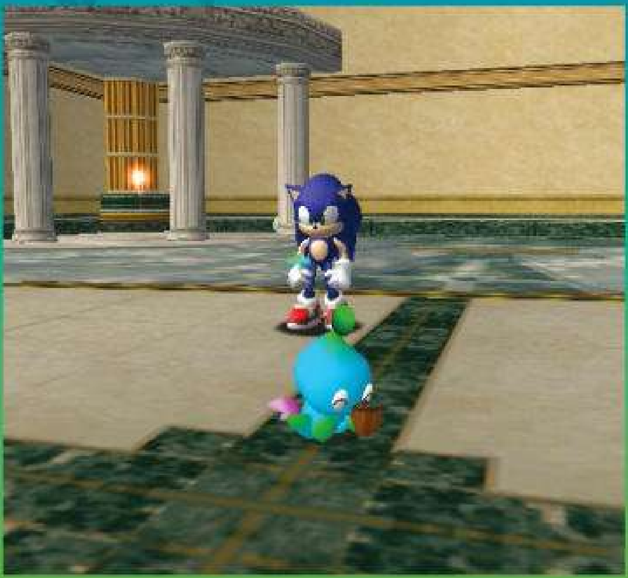
A good casino level is always a welcome sight in a *Sonic* game, and Bingo Highway is one of the very best. Where Casino Park was a gentle introduction, this stage keeps the platform elements and the gigantic 3D pinball tables and ramps up the action. The best bit is rolling down the bingo courses, trying to complete lines for rings as the frantic electronic backing track drives you forward.

SPACE RACE

SONIC COLOURS, WII, 2010

We should be wary of visiting any theme park run by Robotnik, but with attractions as spectacular as Starlight Carnival it's easy to see the appeal. Between puzzle sections focused on the blue Wisps, you run along an unpredictable ribbon-like road that twirls and weaves its way around a convoy of colourful spacecraft, dodging enemy lasers and fending off Motobug attacks as part of the game's best thrill ride.





GET A-LIFE

SONIC ADVENTURE, DREAMCAST, 1998

Though it had dabbled with the concept before in *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, Sonic Team's A-Life system was massively expanded with the creation of the Chao Garden. Caring for the cute little critters wasn't just a perfect way to unwind between action stages – thanks to the gaming capabilities of the Dreamcast's VMU memory card, you could even take them out with you and continue making progress while away from your console.

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Shared Route Ch. 2-5 Heike's Nobles

Yes

No

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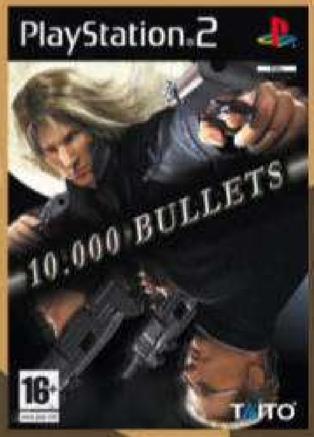
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